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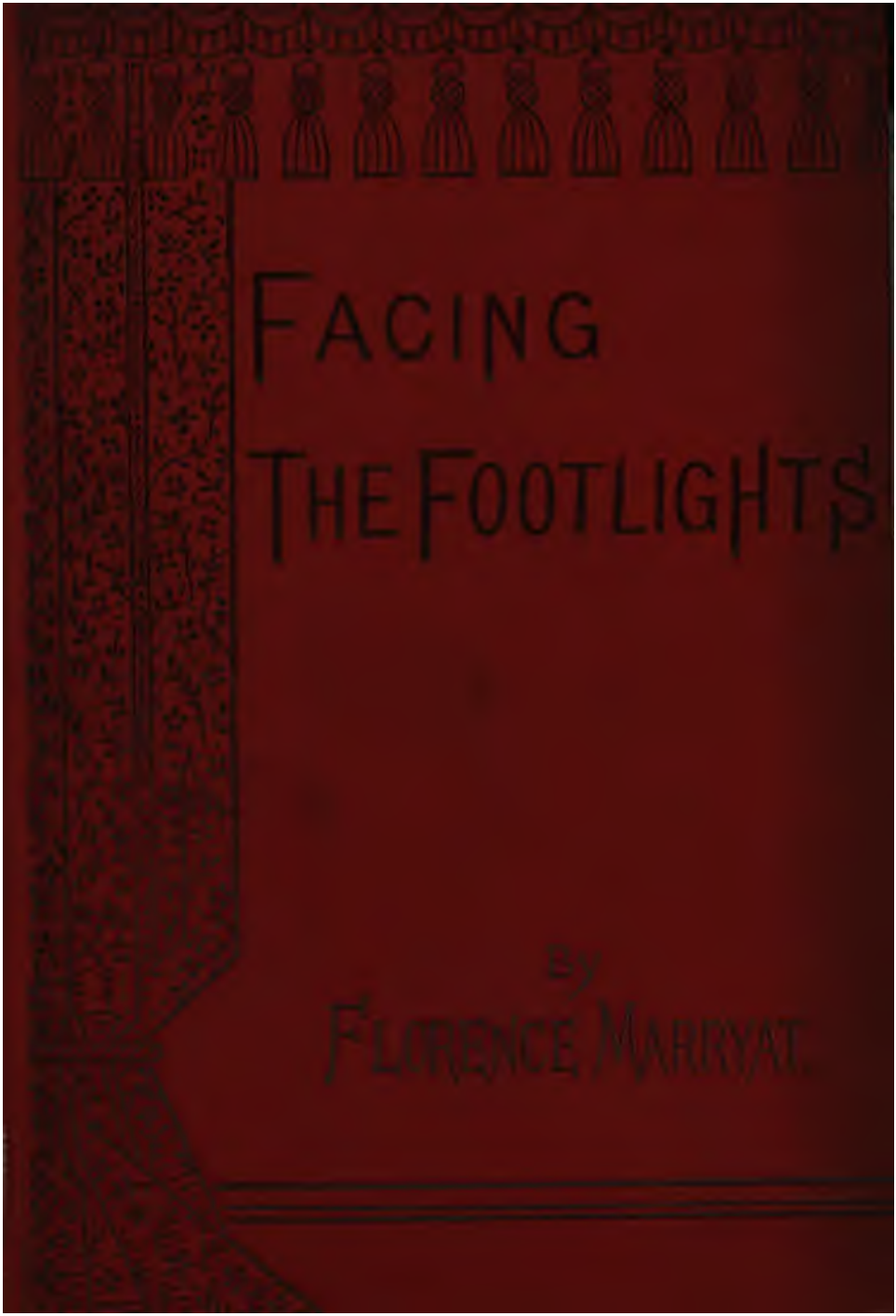
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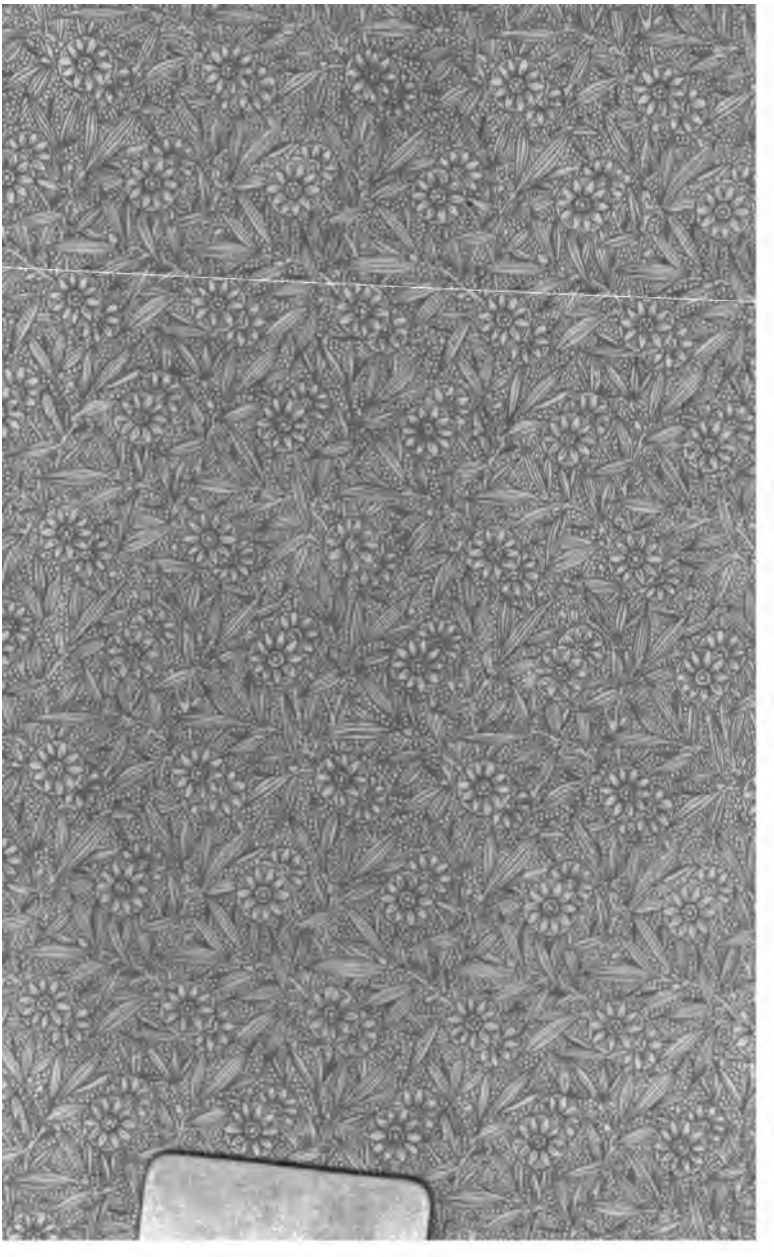

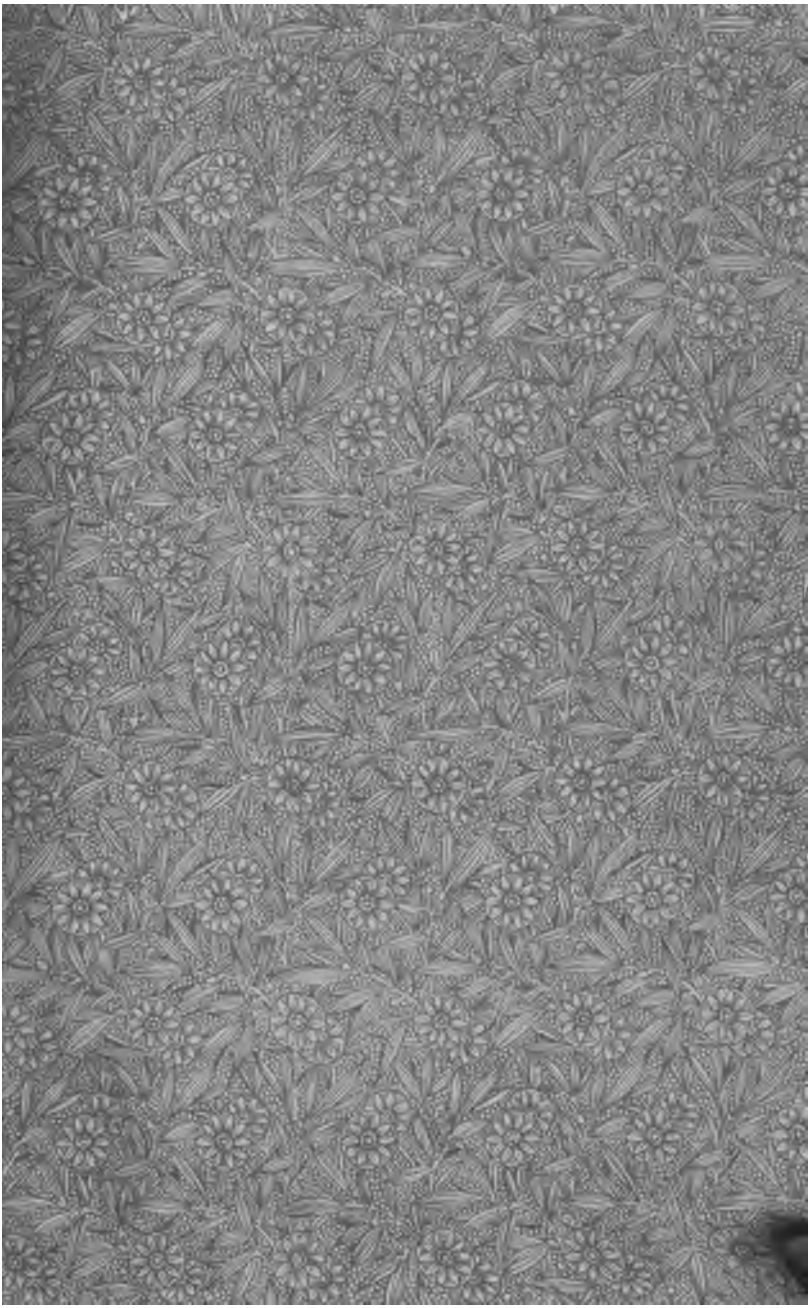

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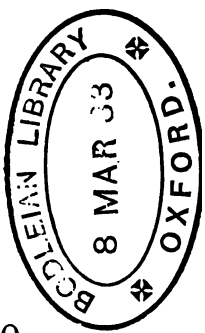
FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS.

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT
(MRS FRANCIS LEAN),
AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "MY SISTER THE ACTRESS," "PHYLLIDA," ETC. ETC. ETC.



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FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS.

CHAPTER I.

"SHE NEVER ENTERS ALDWYN TOWERS."

ALDWYN TOWERS was one of the show places of Hertfordshire. It was a magnificent building, replete with every modern improvement, and standing in several acres of land, laid out in ornamental shrubberies and pleasure grounds. As the London train rushed past it, the passengers would point it out to one another as the residence

of the Earl and Countess of Marlsbrook, and something to be looked at and remembered. And most people, glancing at the evidences of wealth and luxury by which it was surrounded, would think, with a sigh, how much the owners of Aldwyn Towers were to be envied.

But Lord Marlsbrook was of quite a different opinion. He lived at Aldwyn Towers quite against his will. He would rather a thousand times have occupied his own feudal estate of Barry-cleudich, in Scotland, if he had only possessed the fortune on which to keep it up. For the fact is, that Aldwyn Towers did not belong to him. It was the property of his wife, Lady Marlsbrook, and she held it, together with her enormous fortune, in trust for Sir Francis Aldwyn, her son by a former marriage. Some little flutter had been occasioned in polite society by the alliance of the Earl of Marlsbrook with the widow of a man who had made

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friends—until about ten years previously to the opening of this story, when he had been accidentally thrown into the company of the then newly widowed Lady Aldwyn.

Lady Aldwyn, at that time, had been a very handsome woman of five-and-thirty, encumbered only with a son of thirteen or fourteen, who was being educated at Eton; and she made direct advances towards the bashful peer. She had commenced life in a very humble fashion, as the wife of plain William Aldwyn, a hard-working clerk in a city firm. Her husband's good fortune had come to him as rapidly as it did unexpectedly, and when, to crown all, he was made a baronet, his wife believed her happiness to be complete. But we are seldom satisfied with our lot in this world, whilst a higher one hangs dangling within our reach.

No sooner had Sir William died, leaving everything he possessed to his son and

widow, than the lady began to think how she could still better her position. The boy, Sir Francis, was amply provided for during her lifetime, and was to inherit all at her death. Lady Aldwyn had, therefore, no one but herself, and nothing but her own interests to consider; and she was quite undecided as to what action she should take, when the Earl of Marlsbrook was introduced to her. She saw her opportunity and seized upon it.

Here was a bachelor peer, plain and needy, and the bait presented to him, a handsome widow with thirty thousand a-year. Lord Marlsbrook rose to the fly at once. Lady Aldwyn was so considerate as to take the trouble of courting off his hands, and all he had to do was to write her a curt proposal, which was warmly accepted, and in a very short period ratified at the altar.

The lady had known well what she was about. She was now a countess, on an

equality, socially, with any woman in the realm, and the whole of her vast fortune remained in her own hands.

Lord Marlsbrook had never regretted the step he took with regard to her but once, and that was—always. He had not been married three weeks before he had to relinquish all hopes of building up the fortunes of Barry-cleudich on his wife's money. Lady Marlsbrook had not the slightest intention of squandering her substance on the renovation of an old Scotch castle. She hated Scotland (so she emphatically averred) and everything in it. It was a horrid, cold, bleak country, and never agreed with her constitution, and she was resolved to live nowhere but at Aldwyn Towers, which her dear Sir William had built expressly for her habitation, and which her dear child, Sir Francis, was to inherit after her. Indeed, before long, Lord Marlsbrook was so sick of the names of "Sir William" and "Sir Francis," that he was apt to couple any

allusion to them with an emphatic word beginning with D.

To him, who had been reared in an atmosphere of titles, and thought no more of them than a commoner would of the ordinary prefix of Mr, his wife's constant allusions to the mushroom baronetcy appeared still more vulgar than it would have done to a man of lesser birth; and it was not until he had thrown her into hysterics by reminding her of the position to which he had raised her, and begging her to try and forget that from which she had sprung, that he obtained any peace on the subject. But the sore was open even to this day, and whenever any dispute arose between the married couple, "Sir Francis" (now a young man of six-and-twenty) was certain to be brought in, in confirmation of Lady Marlsbrook's side of the question, until the earl began almost to hate the very innocent owner of the title. For Sir Francis Aldwyn inherited none of the vulgarity of his

mother's mind. He had stolen a large portion of her beauty, being a tall, fine young fellow, with fair hair and blue eyes, but he had his father's capacity for work, and would have carried it out, had Lady Marlsbrook not had been so foolish as to prohibit it. He had been educated at Eton and Cambridge, and was well up in his classics, and most of the athletic accomplishments of the day. He had a taste for the fine arts into the bargain, and always felt tired and out of sorts whilst condemned to the dull monotony of life as spent at Aldwyn Towers. He passed most of his time in London therefore, having an ample income of his own, and was a well-known *habitué* of the clubs and theatres.

Lord Marlsbrook liked the young man better than he acknowledged to himself. He had no family of his own, and his wife's platitudes were an incessant irritation to him. Whenever he could escape

from them, he found his way up to London, and the society of his stepson, but he never accompanied him to any of his haunts.

Sir Francis laughingly averred that the old gentleman did not know what was good for him; but wiser people said that Lord Marlsbrook must have had some trouble in his early life so entirely to quench his natural spirit; for, from the age of thirty, he had never appeared otherwise than silent, thoughtful and reserved. If Lady Marlsbrook would only leave him alone in the solitude of his library, he appeared to have gained all that he desired. As he sat there, when we first see him at home, with his head bent thoughtfully over his papers, he looked anything but attractive to the eye. He was a tall, spare man, very thin, and narrow-chested, with grey hair and whiskers, a prominent nose, and high cheek bones—eminently refined, but terribly lacking in

beauty. He wore glasses, in order to read the letters which had just been brought him from the post, and as he pored over one in particular he pushed them up and down in a perturbed and uncertain manner as though he were at his wit's end to know what to do. The letter was from Mr Overton, and Lord Marlsbrook, *alias* Mr Thane, read it through several times before he laid it down again. And then he took off his glasses, folded his hands together, and, lying back in his armchair, gave vent to a deep-drawn sigh. Ah! these early follies! How they come back in later years, bringing the crops of entanglement that have sprung from them, for us to root up or unravel.

The earl was as puzzled at that moment to know what to do as if his years had numbered twenty instead of fifty. For Mr Overton, after describing somewhat graphically the effect which the intelligence he had been commissioned to impart

to her had produced upon Eudora, and the vehemence with which she had refused to receive any further assistance at her father's hands, went on to speak of Mrs Gerome, in the following terms:—

"The lady who has offered to receive Miss Thane as her companion is (as far as I know) a very estimable person, but I must not conceal from you that I have heard that she is (or has been) a professional actress, and may have some latent design of persuading Miss Thane to go upon the stage. And this is, I conclude, the very last thing you would wish her to do, though I know of no argument, except that of kindness, which you can use to influence her in the matter. Is it quite impossible, my dear lord, that you can take this poor girl at this crisis under your own protection?"

Lord Marlsbrook did not see how it was possible; but he did not like the alternative any the more for the difficulties that lay in the way of its prevention. He could

very well understand the spirit in which Eudora had received the news of her own birth, and her lover's defalcation. He could remember, even at this length of time, sundry painful interviews which he had held with another Eudora, whose flashing eyes and bitter words of reproach haunted him still. He had been so foolish and short-sighted in those days as to believe that the scorn of the world at his making a *mésalliance* would have the power to mar his domestic happiness, and so he had doubted and wavered until it was too late, and death had ended her struggles and concealed her shame. And would he have been less happy or less proud — so thought Lord Marlsbrook, as he sat in that chair, with his grey head bowed in his hands—if Eudora Ainsley had been the wearer of his coronet at that moment, and her child living under his roof-tree, above the touch of dishonour or contempt. But it was all past now ; it was no use thinking of it. The present and its diffi-

culties had to be battled with and overcome instead.

He did not like the idea of the girl being with strangers, but how was it to be avoided? Mrs Griffin was dead, Edgar Deane had apparently no serious intentions regarding her, and she refused to remain in Holyoak, or to accept the means of subsistance at his hands. She was as proud as her mother had been before her. She disdained to accept as charity what she considered should have been hers by right. There was but one way out of it—so far as he could see—and that was to interest Lady Marlsbrook (if possible) in Eudora's case, and induce her to extend a helping hand towards her. She was a woman of the world, who made no more pretensions to religion than she did to love for himself. Surely she would not be very hard upon him for a fault that happened so many years before they met. And if she would consent to receive Eudora Thane at Aldwyn Towers—

to call her a cousin, a niece, the orphan of a dead friend, anything, sooner than what she was — perhaps the girl's heart would soften towards him, and she might be induced at least to accept a provision at his hands.

In arguing thus, Lord Marlsbrook was actuated simply from a motive of justice. He did not love the sight of his daughter; on the contrary, it was a pain to him. The sights that remind us of the injuries we have inflicted on others usually are so. He had seen but very little of her during her childhood; as little as he possibly could; and after each visit to Holyoak, he had returned home, more miserable and self-reproachful than before. For he had really loved Eudora Ainsley, and the sight of her child revived the bitterest memories of his life. He would rather never have seen his daughter again—if it were possible—but since she lived, he felt bound to do something for her. If Lady

Marlsbrook could only be persuaded to take an interest in the girl, what a load it would lift from his breast. He rose as he thought thus, and walked, almost mechanically, to a secretary that stood at one side of the room. In the same abstracted manner, he unlocked it, and took a few papers, yellow and creased with age, from a private drawer.

They were only some dozen letters, written in a girlish hand, full of love, and hope, and pleasant anticipations of the future. Lord Marlsbrook did not read, nor even unfold them, each word they contained was written on his heart in letters of fire, but his hand trembled like a leaf as it touched the paper.

"*Her* child!" he said to himself, in a low voice; "*her* child!"

He was not thinking of Eudora Thane at that moment, he was thinking only of Eudora Ainsley. His mind was filled with thoughts of the past and her. In fancy

he saw again her laughing eyes and bright, expressive smile; he heard the tones of her voice, so fond and trusting; he felt the pressure of her hand; he saw, good God! her beautiful face distorted with reproachful fury, and then, for the last time, quiet, and still, and hushed for ever in her coffin. As Lord Marlsbrook remembered it, he ground his teeth together, thrust the letters back into their hiding place, and turning hurriedly away, rang the bell. In another moment a servant appeared at the door.

"Is her ladyship downstairs yet?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Ask if she can receive me."

In a short time the man returned, with an intimation that her ladyship was in her boudoir, and would be happy to see his lordship at any time; and the earl, in obedience to the summons, left the library. Was it thus he would have sought the presence of Eudora Ainsley? He could not help

thinking that rebellious thought as he entered Lady Marlsbrook's private room.

"I hope I see you well, my dear?" he commenced, with old-fashioned politeness, as he took a chair.

"Pretty well, thank you, Marlsbrook," returned the ex-Lady Aldwyn, settling the folds of her blue cashmere *peignoir*.

"Do you intend to drive out this morning?"

"I hardly think so; it looks to me as if it were going to rain. And I am expecting my son, Sir Francis, down to-day. I have just received a letter from him to say he intends paying us a visit."

"It is almost time he should do so. He has not honoured the Towers for the last two months."

"Really, Marlsbrook, you talk as if Sir Francis were still a boy at school! Pray remember that he has been of age these four years and more."

"That is no reason that he should neglect

his mother to spend all his time with strangers. When *I* was a young man I was taught that my first duty was to show consideration to my parents."

"Perhaps you had not the same temptations to remain away from home that Sir Francis has. There is no merit in a penniless lad resisting the temptations of the town. You seem to forget the claims that society make upon my son. When a man has money he is expected to spend it."

"Well, my dear, if you are satisfied, no one else has a right to complain. But I should think Frank would be all the better for a little less of what you call society."

"Of what *I* call society! And, pray, what would *you* call it? You know that Sir Francis has an *entrée* into the very highest circles. Only last week his name was quoted in the *Court Circular* with those of the Duchess of Portsmouth and Lady Mirabel Sefton."

"Lady Mirabel Sefton! It is not much

credit to any young man to have his name linked with hers."

"Really, Marlsbrook, you are the most extraordinary creature I ever knew! You don't mean to pretend to run down Lady Mirabel Sefton—the beauty of the season, and the acknowledged favourite of royalty?"

"A woman who allows her face to be sold to every grocer's boy who can afford a shilling wherewith to purchase it, on consideration of receiving a share of the shopkeeper's profits; who makes an open trade of her beauty, and, having married a man with five thousand a-year, keeps up an establishment that must cost double—by what means is best known to herself. Yes, Lady Marlsbrook, I think that Lady Mirabel Sefton is a woman of whose acquaintance neither Frank nor any other fashionable young fool has any reason to be proud."

"What! When you know how well she is received at court?"

"The less said about that the better. There are many women received at court who are fitter for the gutter; and Lady Mirabel will only keep her position there so long as she is not found out; or so long as she remains in favour with those who have the interest to preserve it for her."

"I cannot say that I think you are competent to judge of such things, Marlsbrook, and, young as he is, I would rather take the opinion of my son Sir Francis on any social question than I would yours. A man must have money in order to see society properly, and, until you have seen it properly, you cannot be fit to pass an opinion upon its customs. Lady Mirabel Sefton may be what you say, but in society one does not speak of such things. It is impossible for anybody to be perfect, and so long as the outward demeanour is all that it should be, it is considered an impertinence to interfere with the private thoughts or actions of any one."

"I am glad to hear you say so, my dear, because I conclude it can only be a charitable motive that makes you stand up in defence of Lady Mirabel Sefton, and I have intruded on your privacy this morning, with the especial design of appealing to your charity on behalf of some one in whom I am much interested."

"Dear me! I hope your lordship is not going to ask me to subscribe any more money for the relief of those wretched peasants in Barry-cleudich, for I sent them twenty pounds six months ago, and I am positively tired of hearing that they are starving."

"Don't alarm yourself. It is not my poor tenantry this time, nor am I about to make any demands upon your purse. It is your *heart*, my dear, that I wish to appeal to—nothing more."

The earl could hardly have found anything *less* to appeal to, but his assurance seemed to pacify Lady Marlsbrook, who,

lying back languidly in her chair, prepared, with half-closed eyes, to listen to what he might have to tell her.

"I know," began the earl, "that I am speaking to a woman of sense, and a woman of the world, and, therefore, I need not make any apologies for introducing a subject which would not be considered a fit topic for mixed conversation. Your approval, my dear, of the conduct of Lady Mirabel Sefton shows that you have no foolish squeamishness in your composition, and the comments I have heard you pass on some of Frank's follies prove that you are perfectly aware of the sort of life which is usually lived by young men of the world."

"Really, Marlsbrook, I have no idea what you are driving at! What can the actions of Lady Mirabel or Sir Francis have to do with your appeal to my charity?"

"Simply, my dear, that I suppose you will not be surprised to hear that *I*, too,

was once young, and as careless and unprincipled as others of my age and sex."

"I daresay you may have *thought* as carelessly, Marlsbrook, but you can hardly have had the same temptations to be led astray as Sir Francis. His large fortune, both in the present and future, renders him unfortunately open, poor, dear boy, to attacks of every kind."

"Have you never heard, my dear Emily," said the earl, addressing his wife by her Christian name, in his hope of enlisting her sympathy, "of the temptations which may come from the heart alone, without any reference whatever to money? Such a temptation came to me nearly twenty years ago. I was deeply attached to a girl, considerably beneath me in station, but I was too great a coward—too much afraid of the world's opinion—to make her my wife."

"And a very good thing, too," interposed the countess; "nothing drags a man down

like marrying beneath him, and especially when he has no money to force society, for its own sake, to condone the offence."

"Yes; if I had had the moral courage to leave her altogether, it would have been a very good thing for both of us," said Lord Marlsbrook, with a sigh; "but I had not, Emily. I deceived the poor girl, and the consequences have laid heavily on my conscience ever since."

"Really, Marlsbrook, I cannot understand why you should have elected to offend my ears with this recital. It is hardly showing the respect due to me as your wife. Naturally, such things must happen sometimes, but the less said about them the better. The indecency lies in mentioning them; and an old affair, that happened twenty years ago, too! What can have induced you to rake it up? Pray, let me hear no more of it!"

"Nay, my dear, I must ask you to listen to me for a moment longer. It is not

likely I should have spoken to you of this unfortunate occurrence without a reason. This poor girl has been long dead, but her misfortunes did not die with her. She left me a daughter!"

"Good gracious! Lord Marlsbrook! How extremely indelicate! That is the worst of these common people! They never know how to conduct these little matters decently. They blazon everything to the world."

Lord Marlsbrook was too serious to enjoy the humorous element which the countess had introduced in the conversation.

"Yes," he acquiesced, "she left a daughter behind her. An old acquaintance of mine, Mrs Griffin, the widow of my father's man of business, took the child from her birth, and brought her up for me, and, as she was comfortably provided for, there was no need to trouble you about the matter. But Mrs Griffin is now dead, and I find it difficult to provide another home for the girl. What can I do?"

He looked wistfully at the woman he had married, in hopes of seeing some spark of pity in her eyes. But there was none. She turned her head away from him, and answered in a tart voice,—

"I am sure *I* cannot advise you, Lord Marlsbrook. I have not been in the habit of being consulted on such matters. I suppose you must do something to put the creature in the way of earning her own living. Make her a housemaid, or a dressmaker, or a telegraph girl! Anything would be good enough, I should think, for a woman of that sort."

"But you misunderstand me, my dear! This girl's mother was a lady. She has been brought up as a gentlewoman, and she is a very handsome girl into the bargain. I would not allow her to earn her living in any manner that was unbefitting my daughter."

"Then you must do as you think fit in the matter, Marlsbrook. You surely can-

not expect *me* to interfere in such things?" replied the lady, tossing her head.

"Of course, I would not trouble you for the world," he rejoined; "and it would be neither fair nor right to ask you to trouble yourself; but I thought, Emily, that as this place is so large, and our means so ample, I might introduce her as my niece, or a distant cousin, you know, and—"

"Do you mean to propose to bring her to Aldwyn Towers?" exclaimed the countess.

"Well, my dear, she is a gentlewoman, when all's said and done, and a very beautiful girl into the bargain, and she feels her position, poor child, so deeply, that I thought if you could show her a little kindness, it—"

"You must be *mad*," interrupted Lady Marlsbrook, "positively mad, to propose such a thing. Do you wish to insult me?"

"Very far from it! I wish only to give you an opportunity of extending the same

charity to me that you do to Lady Mirabel Sefton and Sir Francis Aldwyn."

"It is absurd," cried the countess, fanning herself, "even to compare the cases. Lady Mirabel, indeed, with her court patronage, and a vulgar intrigue of your own, that took place twenty years ago! It was most indiscreet of you to revive the subject, Marlsbrook, or even to mention this young person to me. Let me beg, once for all, that I never hear an allusion to her again."

"I don't think you would be so hard if you could see her," said the earl, sadly. "She is only eighteen, and she never heard the circumstances of her birth till a few days ago. It has cut her up terribly, and she has left the friends with whom she was staying, and placed herself under the protection of strangers, with the intention—so she says—of earning her own livelihood, and never accepting further any assistance at my hands."

"Then, why should you trouble your

head about her?" said Lady Marlsbrook. "If she has gone, so much the better. You have supported her hitherto. Let her look out for herself in the future, You may be sure she will fall on her feet."

"I wish I could be sure of it. If she is provided for, it is all I desire. Her presence can never be anything but a bitter reproach to me. But my friend Overton writes me now that she has accepted a situation as companion to an actress. Suppose she should take it into her head to go on the stage?"

"The best thing for her!" exclaimed his wife; "especially if she is handsome. She will make a fortune then, and trouble you no further."

"But think of the temptations of such a life for a young girl of eighteen, Emily," said the earl. "What should I feel if she proved to be too weak to resist them?"

"Why, that she was a worthy daughter

of her mother," said Lady Marlsbrook, with a harsh laugh.

"You have no heart," replied the earl angrily, as he rose from his chair. "I was a fool to suppose I could appeal to it. I see that the girl would be better anywhere than at Aldwyn Towers. If she does not possess the advantages of your birth, she has a breast as yet uncontaminated by the false morality of the world. And I am not sure, Lady Marlsbrook, whether even the stage will not prove a purer school for her than the teaching which would be conveyed by the conduct and conversation of some of your fashionable friends."

"You can hold what opinion you like on the subject, but you will never be able to prove it," she sneered back again; "for so long as I live, that girl will never see the inside of Aldwyn Towers, nor of any house that belongs to me."

Lord Marlsbrook was too angry to discuss the matter with her any further, and leaving

the room hastily, returned to his own apartment. But after hours of thought and cogitation, he could think of nothing better to reply to Mr Overton than this,—

"I have been considering the subject of your letter of this morning from every point of view, but can arrive at no conclusion except to let Miss Thane follow her own inclinations. I *cannot* protect her more efficiently than I have done hitherto. There are insuperable objections to a closer intercourse between us, which your worldly knowledge will readily understand. But I am very unwilling that the provision for her maintenance should pass out of my hands. You say that she will not leave England for the next week. Will you let her know at once that I am both desirous and willing to allow her one hundred pounds a-year until she marries, or otherwise provides for herself: that I am a poor man, or the allowance would be larger, but such as it is, I beg of her to accept it, for her

mother's sake, and to apply to me in any emergency or trouble? Beyond this, I do not see what I can do, or am called upon to do. If Miss Thane is still obstinate, and refuses my offer, I have no real power (as you say) to control or direct her actions. But I trust she will not allow the remembrance of my youthful errors to press upon me too hardly, by making me think they have been the means of driving her forth upon the world without a protector."

Mr Overton considered Lord Marlsbrook's proposal a liberal one, for he knew that, for his position in life, he was really poor, but he wished that he had written it to Eudora herself, or sought an interview with her in London. He evidently desired to do his duty as far as he could; but it was justice he was dealing out to her, and Eudora was too proud to accept justice at his hands, when a few words of affection might have melted her to tears. However, he executed his lordship's commission, and the result

was what he had anticipated. Eudora treated the proposed annuity as she had treated the offer of five hundred pounds. She absolutely and unconditionally refused it, whilst she expressed her determination to earn her own living, and be indebted to no one. So that Mr Overton's reply was very unsatisfactory.

"I regret to inform your lordship," he wrote, "that Miss Thane absolutely refuses your offer of assistance, either now or in the future. I trust this may be only the expression of her first wounded feelings, and that a more grateful recognition of your kindness may succeed it. However, for the present, she is resolute, and therefore, I suppose, we must let her follow her own will, which, I trust (knowing the pureness of her principles), will lead her only to good. Meanwhile, my lord, you have nothing to reproach yourself with. You have acted as generously as possible in the matter, and it will be Miss Thane's

own fault if she suffers from a rejection of your kindness."

But Lord Marlsbrook's conscience did not feel quite easy, even under the absolution of his friend. The memory of Eudora Ainsley was more constantly present with him after the reception of that letter than it had been for years previously and on occasions when cases, similar to hers, were mentioned in his hearing, a fierce pain would go through his heart, as he wondered if she still knew what was passing in this lower sphere, and if her spirit hated him for letting their child wander (fatherless and unprotected) through a world which had been so cruel to herself.

CHAPTER II.

"YOUR SLAVE TILL MY LIFE'S END."

LADY MIRABEL SEFTON was undoubtedly a very pretty woman, and, in her present circumstances, she had every opportunity of showing off her beauty to advantage. For Lady Mirabel had not always been clothed in silks and satins, nor able to indulge each whim as it rose uppermost in her frivolous mind. One of the numerous family of a needy Irish peer, she had blossomed like a flower in the desert—half-taught, half-clothed, half-fed—until old Sir John Sefton had passed the portals of her

father's house, and picked her out from a bevy of fair daughters to be the mistress of his home. And Lady Mirabel had accepted the situation without the slightest hesitation. She was utterly without heart; no foolish love-dreams had ever stirred the current of her life, to render her averse to becoming the wife of a man three times her own age. Sir John's money was all she cared for or thought of, and hitherto it really had done what so few things do in this world, it had fulfilled her expectations. She had been brought to London, and introduced into society, and her beauty had immediately made her the rage. Some worn-out woman of fashion, who was no longer able to attract people to her *réunions* by reason of her own fascinations, and therefore was always on the look-out for a novelty to draw her friends together, saw Lady Sefton—asked her to her house—raved of her beauty every-

where, and made others rave about it also. It is sufficient to tell people that a woman is the loveliest creature in the world, to make them follow suit; what everybody says, they think, must be true.

The guests who were asked to the Honourable Mrs Marabout's evenings, simply to gaze at Lady Mirabel Sefton, saw a very pretty girl, of two or three-and-twenty, with deep blue eyes, and black hair, with a rose-leaf complexion, and a willowy figure. Scores of blue eyes, and delicate complexions, and graceful figures had passed in review before them, during their many fashionable campaigns, but they saw Lady Mirabel only with Mrs Marabout's eyes, and declared that she was the greatest beauty that had ever appeared in a London drawing-room.

Poor old Sir John, who little suspected the evil that should ensue from all this flattery, fanned the adu-

lation of the crowd to the last extent, by hanging his beautiful young wife with jewels, and dressing her in *confections* from Worth. If beauty unadorned had excited their admiration, what was too much for them to say of a face which smiled at them from beneath a tiara of diamonds?

The fashionable papers took up Lady Mirabel and her jewellery, and did not know which to mention in the warmer terms. The photographers asked leave to exhibit her likenesses, and before long they were on sale in every second-hand library in the town. She appeared in a series of *tableaux vivants* at one of Mrs Frisky's aristocratic entertainments, and her fortune was made.

The "hupper suckles," as Jeames Plush calls them, heard rumours of her beauty; royalty became curious to see the loveliest woman in the kingdom, and for

awhile Lady Mirabel Sefton most certainly enjoyed such a popularity as has fallen to the lot of very few private people. She swayed the fashionable world—no ball nor garden party was a success without her—and crowds would wait for hours in the public thoroughfares only to see her pass.

Poor, simple Sir John was even more delighted than the beauty herself by the commotion she created. She was his property, or so he believed her to be —all the world was envying him—or so he thought it was—and so he went about, rubbing his honest old hands together, and chuckling over his good fortune.

But Lady Mirabel had not been in quite such high favour with society the last season — and every one knew it except her husband. Something was wrong, that was evident — though no

one could say exactly what it was. She had not appeared at Court, nor been seen so much in the higher circles as hitherto—and the company she kept at her own house was of a lower grade than it had been. People shrugged their shoulders when they spoke of Lady Mirabel, and said she had had her day, and they only wondered it had lasted so long, and Sir John was a fool not to control her better, and prevent her being talked about.

She still went out a great deal in society, but she was no longer hand-in-glove with all the dukes and duchesses in London; and she had taken up private theatricals warmly, and was continually at rehearsals at other people's houses, or being "coached" by professionals at her own. Her good old husband, who never suspected that his wife was addicted to flirtation, and was only too pleased to see her interested and amused, allowed her to go where she would, and

receive whom she liked, so that occasionally he entertained as guests at his table people whose antecedents he would have been rather surprised to hear. But although the pride of Lady Mirabel Sefton had certainly had a fall, it was still accounted a great thing to be on intimate visiting terms with her, and Sir Francis Aldwyn was thought a very lucky young fellow to have the *entrée* to her house at all times; which, to do him justice, he took advantage of. Lady Mirabel's house was small, but extremely fashionable, and it was a pleasant thing to while away the warm afternoons in her shaded drawing-room, and to talk to her of every subject under the sun, whilst she lounged, like a lovely sultana, clad in the last Parisian fancy, on her ottoman, and permitted her visitors to revel in the contemplation of her beauty. As Sir Francis and Lady Mirabel sat thus together, on a sunny day in June, they did not look ill-fitted to each other; for he was almost as handsome in his way

as she was in hers—and she took care to let him know she thought so. There they were—two fashionable young fools—each liberally gifted by nature—with sufficient wit to take them through the world, and plenty of money to lift them above its cares, and yet they could find nothing better to talk of than the impossibility of finding anything to do.

"It really seems, you know," said Sir Francis, in the sweet drawl adopted by his set, to show that they have "used up" everything, inclusive of their own brains; "it really seems, Lady Mirabel, as though the world must be coming to an end—everything is so slow. There really isn't a single thing left to do, you know—is there now?"

"Nothing," sighed Lady Mirabel; "and yet there have been a great many balls this season — more than I ever remember before!"

"Ah! balls—yes! but one gets so tired

of dancing; it is such an exertion, you know!"

"So it is! but dancing is after all not the best part of a ball."

"My mother wants me to go down to Aldwyn Towers. As if one *could* go to the country just in the very midst of the season. Ridiculous! isn't it?"

"That is just like poor Sir John! He actually proposed our spending the summer at my father's place in Queenstown! Fancy! vegetating in Queenstown in June —a funny idea! And when I have half-a-dozen private theatricals on hand. By the way, Sir Francis, why don't you do something in that line? You would find it most amusing."

"But I can't act, my dear Lady Mirabel. I have never attempted such a thing!"

"Oh! it is very easy—nothing at all, when you've got in the way of it. And Mrs Harcourt would 'coach' you! she is such a dear creature. She would teach you

all you wanted to know, in a couple of lessons."

"And who is Mrs Harcourt?"

"Haven't you heard of her? She was Miss Rolande, the actress, but she is too old for the stage now, and so she teaches instead. Lord Fernlands introduced her to me. She is capital fun. I am sure you would like her; and really very cheap—only ten guineas for the six lessons, and it is worth all that."

"And what does she teach you?"

"Oh! how to stand, and walk, and wave your hands about, and speak your words—everything, in fact. When I have a new part, I send for her, and she coaches me up in it. It saves a lot of trouble, and one has the satisfaction of knowing one is all right."

"Where do you act next, Lady Mirabel?"

"At Mrs Frisky's. We are going to play 'The Wife's Secret' there on Friday. Will you have a card? Do! I don't think you have ever seen me act! I am to play Lady

Eveline Amyott, of course. And my Sir Walter is such a funny little man—clever, but with no appearance. How I wish you were going to play the part instead! We should make a very good couple, shouldn't we? Of course, it is impossible this time, but if you'll consent to get up something with me, I'll manage that we appear together before long."

"But, Lady Mirabel, really you overrate my abilities," stammered the young man; "I never could learn anything by rote—indeed I couldn't; and if I had a part perfect to-day, I should forget it by to-morrow."

"Nonsense! I don't believe you; but if you did, what matter? There is always a prompter, you know, to give you the word, and he will take care you don't stick. And, really, all that is wanted is to be dressed to perfection, and to look very handsome. And in *that* particular, I need not say you will require no 'coaching.'"

Sir Francis looked pleased. Never mind how often we hear a compliment to our beauty—the thing of which we have least reason to be proud—we always feel gratified. It is not in human nature to be otherwise.

"You pay me far too great a compliment," he answered, bowing, "in having noticed my personal appearance at all. It is too much to expect from the acknowledged beauty of the season."

"My dear Sir Francis, my beauty gives me far less gratification than it does anybody else. I am sick of it—sick of hearing it mentioned—of seeing it photographed—of reading of it in the papers! All that I aim at is the cultivation of my talent. And I really think (if I may believe what others say) that I *have* some talent for acting."

Lady Mirabel never deceived herself more than when she delivered the foregoing speech. The cultivation of her talent was

the last thing she had thought of in her new pursuit. The adoration which her good looks had excited was somewhat on the wane : people cannot be expected to stare at a beautiful face for ever, and she wanted a new arena for the display of her attractions. The stage was the very thing. It offered her an opportunity of showing off her talent without concealing her personal charms, and so her vanity was doubly gratified.

" I am sure," said Sir Francis, idiotically, " that you must have talent for everything. No one could look in your face and doubt it for a moment."

But at this juncture a servant announced that Mrs Harcourt had called to see Lady Mirabel, if it were convenient she should be admitted.

" Oh ! show her up by all means. Now, Sir Francis, I shall be able to introduce you to Mrs Harcourt, and get her opinion on your capabilities for acting. She has had

so much experience, she will be able to tell at a glance. And I am sure she will say with me that you will be able to do it beautifully."

Mrs Harcourt, an over-dressed, over-painted woman of sixty, now entered the room, and with much effusion greeted her hostess and pupil. She was a super-annuated actress, who had long been compelled to leave the stage, and make her livelihood by teaching. To her eyes, therefore, a pupil simply represented so many guineas towards housekeeping, and she would have been ready to swear that she descried the latent talent of an Irving or a Macready in any man who had the money to pay her for the compliment.

"My dear Lady Mirabel," she cried, "I have come to ask whether, in your great goodness, you would permit me to postpone our lesson to-morrow until three. I have a new pupil, my dear—the Honourable Sybil Craven. Such a beautiful creature, and perfectly crazy to go on the stage.

So much so, indeed, that her parents have determined to withdraw all opposition to her design, and I hope I shall have the honour of bringing her out. She will create a perfect sensation."

"Miss Sybil Craven!" said Lady Mirabel; "is she not the daughter of Lord and Lady Maltravers? Surely they will never permit her to adopt the stage as a profession?"

"Indeed they will, Lady Mirabel, and many more will follow her example, take my word for that. The stage is not what it was a few years back, nor what it will be in a few years to come. I would bet any sum of money that in ten years' time there will hardly be a woman on the stage (except supers, of course) that has not been born a lady. The fever is spreading, my dear, and it is a very infectious one."

"Fancy Miss Craven!" reiterated Lady Mirabel, still incredulous. "But let me introduce Sir Francis Aldwyn to you, Mrs

Harcourt. I want particularly to hear your opinion about him. I have been trying to persuade him to take part with me in some private theatricals, but he is too modest on the score of his own ability, and thinks that he will not succeed."

Mrs Harcourt turned round and stared Sir Francis in the face. He did not admire her appearance, whatever she might do his. She was a hard-featured and coarse woman, whose hair was dyed orange colour, and whose wrinkles were but inefficiently filled up with powder. And, having a natural leaning towards art, he could hardly believe that its delicate intricacies could be properly interpreted through such an inartistic looking channel.

"Modest are you, Sir Francis?" she exclaimed, in a loud voice. "Well, you must be unusually so, for one of your sex, if you imagine you would not cut a figure on the boards. There's a face and form for hose and doublet! Wouldn't he make

a pretty Orlando to your Rosalind, Lady Mirabel? 'Pon my word, I'd almost take the Gaiety on my own account, and risk all the damages to bring you both out at a *matinée*. What do you say? Shall it be a bargain?"

"But I have always imagined," replied Sir Francis, somewhat annoyed at such open flattery, "that it required something more than a face and figure adapted for the part to interpret such a character as Orlando. I have no dramatic talent, Mrs Harcourt, and never had. My walking-stick would act as well as I should."

"Pooh! pooh! my dear sir. How can you be a fit judge of your own ability, particularly as you have never exercised it? But I am an old stager, you know. I can read the signs of it in your eyes—your brow—the expression of your features. All you want to bring it out are a few good lessons. I don't want to praise myself, but I'd undertake to make you as

good an actor as ever trod the boards in three months' time."

"Oh, Mrs Harcourt, how glad I am to hear you say so!" cried Lady Mirabel, clapping her hands. "I have just been telling Sir Francis what a wonderful 'coach' you are; and now you shall have him for a pupil as well as myself, and we can have our lessons together. What fun it will be! I am quite determined to make him act with me in public before he is many weeks older."

"But, indeed, Lady Mirabel—" commenced Sir Francis, pleadingly.

"Fie! fie! sir," interposed Mrs Harcourt, "are you going to be so ungallant as to oppose the wishes of a lady, and the beauty of the season too? Why, you should be only too proud to think she takes so much interest in you! I warrant there are several hundred good-looking young fellows ready to jump into your shoes if you vacated them."

"No one is more sensible of the honour of Lady Mirabel Sefton's friendship than I am," replied Sir Francis, somewhat hotly.

He was angry and offended by the familiarity of Mrs Harcourt's address.

"Then you must do as I tell you," said Lady Mirabel, with her sweetest smile; "and engage yourself to take a dozen lessons from Mrs Harcourt on the spot; and if you don't care about acting after that, why there'll be no harm done."

"I would obey your orders if they were twenty times as difficult," replied the young man; "and therefore Mrs Harcourt may put me down as another pupil, on condition that my lessons are taken in company with you."

"Oh! certainly! I promise you; and Mrs Harcourt do 'coach' us up in Rosalind and Orlando, or Romeo and Juliet, or some other nice easy parts together. I would give the world to appear on a real stage with Sir Francis; and if we can't get

the Gaiety, we'll engage the first theatre that's vacant, and give the performance for a charity. It will be lovely."

"Ah!" said Mrs Harcourt, with a sigh; "I only wish all your lessons and performances were tending to some good end, Lady Mirabel. I wish you would adopt the stage as a profession, like dear Miss Craven; *then*, there would be some satisfaction in seeing you work so hard."

"Become a professional actress! oh! Mrs Harcourt, what would Sir John say? He would think I had gone out of my mind."

"I should think so," cried Sir Francis; "the idea is proposterous: and what on earth should you do it for?"

"Indeed, sir, you speak very ignorantly," said Mrs Harcourt; "as for Sir John, I venture to say the dear old gentleman would never oppose any wish of Lady Mirabel's; and she would obtain a much wider arena for the display of her genius,

than she can ever have as a private actress. No one ever takes the trouble to criticise an amateur performance — it is beneath notice, however talented the performers may be, the world will never believe it, because it knows that genius will find its audience, and never be content until it has done so. These private theatricals are all very well as an amusement for those who take part in them, but nothing more. They are the pastime of a night; whilst the same talent, used professionally, may reap laurels to last a life time. I always sigh over lessons given to amateurs; it seems such a waste of time; so much money and thought expended for such a small return."

"Why do you give them then?" demanded Sir Francis, rather roughly.

"Because I am the servant of the public, sir," replied Mrs Harcourt, "and in many instances my instructions have brought forth precious fruit. I have placed

a dozen pupils on the stage during the last twelvemonth, who came to me simply for elocution. And, I confess, I should like to add Lady Mirabel to the number. What a sensation she would make, with her reputation for beauty. All the world would rush to see the lady whose photograph is so familiar to them."

"It must be very delightful to be on the professional stage," simpered Lady Mirabel, "and to be sure of an audience every evening, instead of having to sell tickets and ask people to come. And to appear every night too! Why, I am so excited when I am going to act, even in private, that sometimes I cannot sleep for days and days beforehand."

"The excitement would wear off in a very short time," said Sir Francis, "and then you would feel nothing but the labour and fatigue. And what should you do, Lady Mirabel, on the professional stage. You are not in want of money,

as many are. The public would question your motives, and perhaps run you down for the very thing they now profess to admire."

"Really, Sir Francis, I must beg to differ from you!" exclaimed Mrs Harcourt; "for you are talking of a subject on which you evidently know very little. The public would not care two straws if Lady Mirabel's circumstances compelled her to go upon the stage or not. All the public cares for is its own gratification, and it would rush with avidity to gaze upon the beauty which it can never hope to see in private."

"Oh, my poor little face! What an absurd fuss to make about it," said Lady Mirabel, secretly delighted at the prospect of a public ovation.

"You had better have been born as ugly as Hecate," cried Sir Francis, "than make it the gazing stock of a pit and gallery. A waxen effigy of you in Madame Tus-

saud's exhibition would serve the same purpose, and not be so offensive to your modesty."

"Come, come, Lady Mirabel," said Mrs Harcourt, "we really must call this young gentleman to order. He ignores the fact of your talent altogether, and speaks as though your personal charms were the only qualifications you possessed for a professional life. But this young lady has great genius, sir, which you seem to be unaware of, and, if she were as plain as the historical personage you mentioned, I should still advise her to use the gifts with which Providence has endowed her."

"Should you?" replied Sir Francis, curtly, as he turned away. But at this moment Sir John Sefton entered the room. He was an old man of seventy, and not hale even for that age. His back was bent, and his withered face puckered into a thousand wrinkles. He had never been clever in his youth, and in his dotage he

was positively senile. But he always had a smile and a chuckle for Lady Mirabel, whom he considered to be the most perfect creature in mind and body that the Almighty had ever made; and whom he indulged in consequence in every whim and fancy. Had his young wife averred her intention of driving six horses, tandem, down Regent Street, or spending a fortnight in Paris by herself, Sir John would have smiled, and thought it was all right, and supplied her with unlimited money wherewith to carry out the scheme. So that it was not wonderful that, as the old gentleman appeared in her drawing-room, Lady Mirabel sprang towards him, exclaiming:—

"Sir John! Sir John! may I go on the stage?"

"Eh! what?" asked Sir John, beaming on his wife. "What is that you say, my dear?"

"I want to become a regular actress! I am sick of all this amateur work—it is so

much trouble for nothing—and Mrs Harcourt says I should make a tremendous sensation! And you like me to make sensations—don't you?"

"I think you do that wherever you go," replied the old man, pinching her cheek.

"Ah! but I'm tired of being only being looked at—I want to be heard. Say I may —now do."

"I don't quite understand what you want, my dear; but you may be sure I will give it you if it is in my power."

"There's a husband for you!" cried Mrs Harcourt, admiringly; "if there were only a few more men in the world like you, Sir John, how much misery would be spared us. Now, Lady Mirabel, you have fairly gained your point, and, with Sir John's approbation, you will be able to do exactly as you please in the matter."

"I don't think Sir John has the least idea of what it is you wish to do," interposed Sir Francis to Lady Mirabel.

"Yes, he has! He is not so deaf as you think. You know what I said, don't you, Sir John? I am going to be an actress—a regular actress—like Mrs Kendal and Mrs Baucroft."

"Yes, yes, yes!" chuckled the old man.

"And perhaps I shall take a theatre all to myself; and, if I do, you'll have to pay for it."

"Of course, of course, my dear! How much?" asked Sir John, fumbling for his note case.

"Not yet, you old stupid! there's lots of time for that. And I shall wear all sorts of lovely dresses, you know—pink, and blue, and silver—and I shall want lots of money to buy them with; and I shall look so handsome that all the town will be running after me."

"You always do that," said her husband, with another chuckle. "I appeal to Sir Francis if it is not the case."

"It is an accredited fact, Sir John,"

replied the young man; "so much so, that I should have thought Lady Mirabel Sefton's craving for admiration must have been almost satisfied by this time."

"You nasty thing!" cried the lady, petulantly. "I see what you are after. You are trying to put a spoke in my wheel; but Mrs Harcourt is on my side, and so is Sir John; so it will be three against one."

"*I* am always on your side, my dear," said Sir John.

"Of course you are, you old dear! Well then, that matter's settled, and I shall do exactly as I like. But please don't say a word on the subject outside this room, Mrs Harcourt. I must think a great deal more about it, and talk a great deal more about it, before I decide. And perhaps, after all, no one would engage me."

"There is little doubt about that," replied Mrs Harcourt, in a low voice. "Mr Mawdle and Mr Stickler were both raving about you the last time you appeared at

St George's Hall, and would have offered you engagements on the spot had they dared to do so. Not but that you will require a good deal more preparation before you can make the venture; but you know the interest I take in you, and that no endeavours will be wanting on my part to render you perfect."

Shortly after this Mrs Harcourt and Sir John Sefton quitted the room together, and Sir Francis and Lady Mirabel were once more left alone.

"You are surely not in earnest when you speak of going on the stage," said the young man, as he took her hand.

"I don't know why I shouldn't be—my life is a very dull one, and any excitement comes as a pleasing variety to me."

"*Dull!* what, with your resources? You must be joking—with beauty, youth and money at your command, what more can you want?"

"Is money capable of bringing us happi-

ness, Sir Francis ? Surely you know better than that. Sir John is very good and indulgent to me—I have never denied his kindness—but you cannot pretend to believe that he is a suitable companion for me. Why—the dear old creature never accompanies me anywhere! It is not to be expected he should! He is too old to take any interest in the things I like."

Sir Francis sighed.

"That is the evil of an ill-assorted marriage," he said; "forgive me for calling it so, dear Lady Mirabel, but who could look upon your husband and think his decrepitude fitly matched with your angelic beauty."

Tears trembled on the lashes of Lady Mirabel's beautiful dark-blue eyes. She was a very clever woman, in one particular. She could always squeeze out a tear at the right moment. Where they came from was a marvel to herself, but they were always up to time. And so she gained credit for having a warm beating heart in the cavity on

her left side. If her admirers could only have seen how cold and meretricious her nature was.

"I ought not to speak of it, perhaps," said Lady Mirabel, looking straight into Sir Francis's honest blue eyes, with the crystal drops still trembling in her own, "but I was such a child at the time, I hardly knew what marriage was. And then my father persuaded me, and I had been so used to obey him in everything, that I had no will of my own. Don't think the worse of me for it, Sir Francis, but I have been very, very miserable ever since."

"The worse of you!" echoed her companion, warmly. "What! for having sacrificed yourself to your duty as a daughter? But how could your parents have had the heart to let you do it? To throw away all your loveliness on a man who is too old to appreciate it! It was cruel, barbarous! The massacre of Vir-

ginia by her father's hand was less inhuman."

"Hush! hush! I must not let you speak to me like this. Sir John is very good to me, pray remember that — and indulges my fancy in every possible way. But don't be hard upon me because I seem a little greedy of excitement. I require change — distraction — amusement. I cannot afford to stay at home and think. The quiet pleasures that satisfy other women, who have married the men they love, and have children, and domestic happiness, are not for me. And yet I am too young, at twenty-three, to do entirely without amusement, so you must judge me leniently."

"I shall never judge you at all," said Sir Francis; "I am only a slave at your feet waiting to learn your pleasure. Only it is but natural that, admiring you as I do, I should feel jealous at the idea of all the world enjoying the same privilege."

"Don't let us think of it, then. It would be absurd to suppose that I could decide so important a matter in so short a time. And, indeed—(I daresay I am very foolish), but your championship makes me feel inclined to forswear all amusements for the future but such as your judgment approves for me."

"If I could only believe in such happiness," cried the young man fervently.

"Why should I not? You are good enough to express an interest in my welfare, which few do. You see how Sir John treats me. He would let me dance on the tight-rope to-morrow, or appear on the trapeze at the Aquarium, if I said I wished it. What reliance then can I place on his opinion? But if a man like yourself—my equal in age, and my superior in knowledge of the world, had sufficient care for me to guide my actions, and I knew that he did it from a pure

motive, I feel I could deliver myself up to his direction."

Sir Francis Aldwyn felt as if he had been suddenly lifted into the seventh heaven.

"And will you indeed?" he exclaimed, passionately; "would that I were only worthy of the trust you so graciously accord me."

"Stop—stop!" cried Lady Mirabel; "I do not mean to place the control of my life into your hands all at once. But if you will advise me—if you will point out the pitfalls in my way, as a brother might—I will promise to do my very best to avoid them."

"I should be a fool, indeed, to look for more," he answered; "for what you grant me is far above my deserts. And to enter on my duties at once, then, dear Lady Mirabel, will you give up this idea of going on the stage?"

"I can hardly give up an idea which is

not yet conceived, Sir Francis, but I shall not go into the matter further without your approval—and in return for my compliance, you must promise to act with me in private."

"There is not much fear of my refusing to do anything which you may ask me, Mirabel, considering that I would lay down my life in your service. The words you have just spoken have proved a revelation to me. I did not know until this moment how — how precious your friendship has become to me."

Lady Mirabel laid her hand gently on his, and his hand trembled at the contact.

"Let us make a bargain with each other, then," she said, softly. "I will not submit myself to the public gaze, of which you seem so jealous, unless you go with me as a guardian and protector, and you—"

"*I* will hold myself ready to accompany you anywhere—at any moment—at any

inconvenience to myself—and to dash my fist into the face of the first man who dares to look at you except as he would look at some beautiful statue that can never glance back at him in return."

"That's my brave champion!" cried Lady Mirabel, smiling. "And now I shall feel safe wherever I may go. Fancy poor old Sir John dashing his fist at anything bigger than a blue bottle! But we mustn't laugh at the dear old thing. He can't help being old—any more than we can help being young, and foolish, and—"

"And falling in love with each other," interposed Sir Francis, with a new light in his eyes.

"No! no! I never said that! Upon my word you are too bad! *I* shall have to be the Mentor if you begin in this way! And please take your arm away, Sir Francis! There was nothing said in our agreement about your supporting me, and I am quite able to stand by myself."

" Brothers sometimes put their arms round their sisters' waists," pleaded Sir Francis.

" Do they ? I never had a brother, so I cannot tell. But I would rather you didn't follow their example. Some one might come into the room, and I would never forgive you if you were the cause of my being talked about."

" Ask me prettily then, and I will take it away. Look me in the face and call me 'Frank,' and I will do anything in the wide world for you."

" You will take twelve lessons of Mrs Harcourt ? "

" Yes ! "

" And you will play Orlando—or anything else I may ask you—with me afterwards ? "

" Yes ! "

" And you will never contradict me in anything I may say ? "

" Never ! "

"Nor oppose me in anything I may wish to do?"

"Never! I will be your slave and your blackamoor to my life's end."

"Take your arm away, then—Frank."

CHAPTER III.

"THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE."

MRS GEROME, notwithstanding her benevolence, largeness of heart, and determination of character, had not quite calculated the magnitude of the task she had imposed upon herself in taking Eudora Thane away from Holyoak. For the first few days the newness of her position kept up the girl's spirits with a sort of feverish excitement that passed for pleasure.

But after that, she completely broke down, and all the more completely that she had strained her courage to the utter-

most to prevent its occurrence. But it was not for the cruel intelligence that had been imparted to her concerning her birth, nor for the apparent indifference of her father, that Eudora mourned. It was for something quite apart from these facts; for something that lay far deeper in her heart (as Mrs Gerome's perception quickly informed her) that the poor child was grieving. It was not the knowledge of Mr Thane's youthful follies, nor her own nameless position, that made Eudora start and change colour at every step that sounded on the stairs; that kept her all day in deep despondency, and all night in a high fever; that made her moan and toss in her restless sleep, only to wake from it with a cry of terror, and outstretched arms, as though to ward off some frightful memory which haunted her very dreams.

The actress had seen much of the world, and much of the men and women moving

in it, and her experience told her that her *protégée* was trembling on the brink of a nervous fever, and that, if she was to escape it, she must be left to herself. She did not, therefore, put one question to Eudora on the subject; she never courted her confidence, nor seemed to think there was any to bestow; she did not even attempt to comfort her, nor advise her to be brave and drive her grief away. She did what was better than all of these plans put together. She entirely ignored the mental trouble, but told the girl that she was tired, and unfit for physical exertion, and made her go to bed.

"Go to bed, Eudora," said the kind-hearted actress, "and stay there till you feel inclined to get up again. Stay there for a week, if it pleases you. There's nothing like a good rest when you've been thoroughly upset. I know exactly how you feel, my dear; I've passed through

it twenty times myself. Everything is so new and strange about you that you have no time to think, and so your head gets in a whirl. Now, you have promised to be my daughter, you know, so you must do as your mother bids you; and my orders are that you are not to leave your room until you have reduced all the thoughts that are chasing each other through your little brain into something like order. I sha'n't dose you, nor press you to eat, nor fidget you in any way. There's the bell; when you ring, Hannah shall come up to see what you want; and for the rest you shall be left completely to yourself."

So Eudora lay for the space of two or three days in the bed allotted to her use, feeling very safe and secure from contact with anyone from the outer world, and free to indulge her sorrow as she would. It was a hard battle that she fought with herself during that time of seclusion.

There was the old predilection to be looked at from every point of view, more especially from the last in which it had been presented to her. Eudora was not a woman, even at that period, who could go on loving what was false, and base, and untrue. She could not deceive herself either with regard to Edgar Deane.

His character had been revealed to her in one sudden glance, as though a flash of lightning had illuminated the darkness and shown her the garden of roses which she thought so fair to be a hideous swamp, swarming with reptiles and other loathsome things, and she could never respect nor love it again to the last day of her life. It was not the loss of a lover, therefore, that she mourned so much, as the loss of her faith in him.

But is not this at the bottom of our grief for the loss of every earthly affection, excepting those whom we lose sight of through the misty veil of death. Oh,

men and women! who lay down your best and dearest in their coffins, thank God, through your bitter tears, that since they were to go, you part with them thus! Death is an incalculable blessing, when compared with loss of faith. What is it, after all, but a temporary separation—not even that to those who have sufficient spirituality in themselves to believe in the close proximity of the spiritual and material worlds—and temporary loss, if you will, of the sound, and sight, and touch, that so delighted us; and then in a few short years a blissful reunion, all the more blissful because of the memory of the tears with which it was anticipated; and fulness of joy for evermore. But for the loss of faith—for the cruel uprooting of the rock on which we thought it rested—for the pulling down of all our pleasant fancies—the destruction of all our loving dreams—what is to repay us—what can ever blot out that remembrance, and build up our

trust again? Not death—for death cannot change our natures. The cruel man will not all at once be kind, when he passes over to another sphere—the false will not become true—the cold-hearted and selfish, passionate and warm. Death is not a magician that will transform us into something that is not ourselves—it is but the slipping off of an outer shell, as the snake changes his skin once a year, and emerges from it, the same snake as before. There is but one hope in death for those who have learned to unlove each other in this world—that the Creator of all things may in His mercy permit them to see with such clear eyes that even the desire to be able to restore the affection which was forfeited may be forgotten.

For the ancients were right who represented the fabled streams of Lethe as the greatest good that mortal could desire. The only cure for the ills of this life is forgetfulness. Eudora Thane prayed for

it, at this period, as she had never prayed before. Yet, notwithstanding her trouble, she felt very happy to be under the guardianship of Mrs Gerome, and shuddered to think how much more she would have suffered if she had been compelled to remain in Holyoak.

The idea made her very grateful, and when her friend would visit her the last thing at night, and sit by her bedside, telling her every scrap of London gossip that had reached her quick ears during the day, the girl would hold her hand, and look up into her face, with all the fondness of a young and susceptible nature. Mrs Gerome was always bright, and full of cheerful conversation; always, apparently, in good spirits. She possessed the faculty of a true comedian, that of seeing everything from its most ludicrous point of view, and could relate the most ordinary occurrence in so comical a manner as to send her hearers into fits of laughter. To

Eudora, therefore, her presence was like a cordial, to which she began to look forward with eagerness, as a relief from her own distressing thoughts. And Mrs Gerome was quick to see her advantage, and make good use of it. She would bring Eudora long stories of all that was going on in the London world, now beginning to fill rapidly on account of the season; and of all that was about to be produced in the theatrical world. She was engaged herself for the comedy lead at the new theatre, the "Athenian," and she had always some ludicrous incident to relate that had taken place at rehearsal; or some account to give of her new dresses, now in active preparation; or some adventure to tell, that she had encountered whilst shopping, or taking her daily walk with a huge St Bernard dog that was her constant companion. She never urged Eudora to get up and join her in her expeditions, nor asked her when she was going to do so;

she dropped the little seed that was to excite her curiosity, and left it to bear fruit of itself. And the consequence was that in a few days Eudora, having exhausted all her tears, and grown weary of thinking over a grief for which there was no remedy, asked Mrs Gerome of her own accord if she might not go downstairs again, and join her in her daily round of occupation.

The actress chuckled to herself, whilst she pretended to weigh the advisability of yielding too ready a consent.

"I don't wish to coerce you, my dear, of course," she answered, "but I think rest will do you more good than anything else just now. You passed an exciting time before you left Holyoak, and the quieter you keep the better. Besides, there is nothing in which I cannot do without you. Hannah is as happy as a queen, reigning over our little domain, and I shall not need any assistance at

the theatre until we commence next month."

"But, dear Mrs Gerome," pleaded Eudora, "I am getting so tired of being cooped up here; and there is really nothing the matter with me. I can't alter things, you know—I mean about my father; and as you have agreed with me in the propriety of refusing his offers of assistance, I shall not feel happy until I am doing something to help myself."

"Bless me! child, you ought to be an American, you're so horribly independent. You shall do more than enough to earn your living, as soon as I have anything for you to do, but at present I really have not."

"But, Mrs Gerome, I could help Hannah, and that would be better than remaining idle. I mean to take charge of that lovely china I saw in your drawing-room. Hannah says she is afraid to dust it, for fear of its breaking; and then there is your

wardrobe. Surely there must be something there that I could make or mend. I am an excellent needlewoman, really and truly I am. Barthomolew always said it was the only thing I could do well."

"Well, my dear, I beg to differ from Barthomolew, though good needlework is by no means to be despised, and the woman who can't work is a disgrace to her sex. I daresay you will find plenty of use for your needle both in your own wardrobe and mine, for I must confess that I prefer doing anything to mending my clothes. But as to coming downstairs, Eudora, you must please yourself. You are free in that, my dear, as in everything else. I never abuse my neighbour's liberty, and I expect him to respect mine. So all I will say is, that your presence will ever be more welcome to me than your absence."

Mrs Gerome finished up this harangue with such a sounding kiss that, as soon as the door had closed behind her, Eudora

jumped out of bed, and dressed herself, and appeared in the drawing-room (to her friend's intense delight) just as she was about to sit down to a solitary supper of cold lamb and salad.

Mrs Gerome occupied a pleasant little flat of six rooms, in one of those streets that run between Portman Square and the Marble Arch. She had rented it for some time, and had furnished it according to her own taste. She had been such a wanderer on the face of the earth (having fulfilled engagements in America and Australia during the last few years) that the little flat had more than once passed into other hands; still, as Mrs Gerome said, she liked to feel that she had a place of her own—a hearth for her Lares and Penates, and to which she could return when she felt inclined for it. She had returned to it now, after a year's rest in Holyoak, to find that all the furniture required fresh covering, and that there was plenty of work to do

in the way of making lace blinds, and putting up curtains, and generally renovating the rooms for the London campaign. Mrs Gerome was too much occupied herself with rehearsals to be able to attend to any domestic matters for the present, and Hannah had her hands full with the cooking and house work. It was Eudora's place, evidently, to help her friend with the redecoration of her little abode, and when she saw the work that had been waiting her, she felt quite ashamed to think that she had wasted nearly a week in brooding over troubles which were incurable. Mrs Gerome was most vehement in her protestations that there was plenty of time to do everything of the sort; but Eudora was firm in her determination to be of use, and the resolution brought its own reward. She felt happier as she sat stitching at the sofa and chair covers, than she had thought it possible she could do in so short a time. It was the sense of free-

dom and independence that lightened her troubles—the feeling that she possessed the power to leave them behind her, and begin a new life in which, if she could not quite forget them, they should, at least, bear no part. It was the blessed conviction at which she had arrived, that there is a power in work that can lift us *above* suffering—that can lift us even out of ourselves, and transform us into better and higher creatures than we have been before. The short-sighted people who would try and prevent women from earning an independence by means of their own labour, are leaguing themselves together to rob them of the most wholesome and effectual panacea that God has provided against mental suffering. And the women who neglect so grand an opportunity of taking their place in the world as free agents —almost as the arbiters of their own destinies, are thrusting to one side the greatest blessing their humanity affords them.

It is sufficient to mark the different

effect of disappointment or loss upon the sexes, to see which holds the best remedy in its own hands. Men feel as deeply as women; in many instances, far more so, but they have their necessary work to turn to for relief, and the one thought drives out the other. For work, in order to be beneficial, must be necessary. Voluntary labour will not distract our minds from pain, because pain is stronger than our self-will, and, unless the labour be an exigency, it will master it. Thus you will see the artist in trouble lay down his pencil (unless there be an immediate necessity for bread), and declare his inspiration to have deserted him, whereas the actor (who would lose his engagement if he did not appear) will force himself upon the boards, and, depend upon it, feels all the better for the pressure he has put upon his natural inclinations. Work then, to be really useful, must be necessary—and it cannot be necessary, unless it is remunerative.

To be independent of everyone but ourselves and our own exertions is the most glorious and ennobling feeling which we can experience, and women will never rise to the height of which they are capable until they are no longer contented to sit in an armchair and be fed like a set of Circassian slaves, whose highest ambition is to grow fat, and keep their complexions fair. I cannot help feeling more respect for the little dressmaker who earns her own living, and is a burden to no one; or the chorus-singer, who dresses and feeds herself on thirty shillings a-week, than for the highest woman in the land, whose every want is supplied for her, and who rewards the man who pays her bills with positively nothing, and often a great deal worse.

Eudora Thane had all the making in her of an independent woman, though the circumstances of her life had not been such as to call forth the ambition to become so. She would never have accepted Mrs Gerome's

hospitality, however liberally tended. It would have grated on her sense of delicacy to be indebted to any one, except her natural protectors, for means of living. But to save money for Mrs Gerome, to do all for her that Hannah would have done, and to prevent the necessity of her engaging another servant,—that made the labour sweet in itself. It did not hurt her pride to think she was filling the place of a menial. She stitched away at her work as industriously as if she were to be paid so much a yard for it; and coloured with pleasure when Mrs Gerome remonstrated with her for sitting so closely to it, and threatened to hide it away if she would not promise to take it more leisurely.

Not that Mrs Gerome had the slightest intention of using Eudora Thane in the capacity of a workwoman. She only let her do exactly what she took a fancy to for the present, because she saw that what the girl required was active employment.

But she had much higher aims for her young conpanion, and an ambition which she hardly dared broach to her, lest her own views should prove unreliable, and she should subject the girl to further disappointment. She went about it, however, in her own way, and soon satisfied herself that her ideas were right. She was engaged to appear in a series of comedy parts at the "Athenian," and she brought home her play books to the little flat, and studied them aloud in the evenings, whilst Eudora sat by her, busy with her work. After a while, she asked the girl to hear her speak her parts: to maintain the other characters in fact, in order to see if she were perfect; and Eudora, falling into the trap unconsciously, and only anxious to help her patroness, displayed so much natural ability for expression, emphasis, and gesture, that Mrs Gerome surprised her one evening by throwing her arms around her, and assuring her

that she had shown incontestable proofs of dramatic talent.

"I—" cried Eudora innocently, laying down the book; "why—what have I done, Mrs Gerome, except read Sir Harry's words."

"You have read them as I wish the real Sir Harry would, my dear; just as if you felt and meant them; and I am perfectly delighted with your ability. Ah! I thought I was too old a stager to be mistaken! I told you, you were an actress, down at Holyoak, and you just made the same eyes at me then as you are doing now. Wait till I have given you a few lessons, child, and you will acknowledge that I know what I am about."

"An actress!" repeated Eudora, clasping her hands; "oh! I am sure I should like it very, very much. But it will be years and years, dear Mrs Gerome, before I shall be able to do as you do."

"Certainly, my dear, and perhaps you'll never be able to do so," replied the actress,

bluntly; "but that's no reason you shouldn't try. And we will begin our lessons to-morrow morning, if you please, Eudora, for an hour after breakfast; and then I will leave you something to practise during the day; and I prophesy you will get on like a house on fire."

"I hope not," cried Eudora, laughing. "When the fire has burned itself out, there is nothing left but ashes."

"Yes! the ashes of your trouble, child. The fire of genius will have the power to reduce even *that* to something not worth a thought, whilst it will continue to burn on itself—for ever and ever."

It was the first allusion Mrs Gerome had made to Eudora's private feelings since bringing her to London, and it was the last. From the hour that the girl began to join her in her work, she treated her as though she were already cured. Some weeks had still to elapse, however, before Eudora could accompany her friend to the theatre, and see her play the parts which they had studied together; and

she passed the interval in beautifying the little flat, and setting it in spick-and-span order.

Mrs Gerome's rooms were very different in appearance from the ordinary London drawing-rooms. They were filled with all sorts of curious and pretty things, which she had brought home from the various places she had visited—"rubbish" (as Mrs Squires contemptuously styled her mistress's collection), which it took more time to dust and look after than they were worth. She was quite willing, therefore, to hand over the charge of all the china, and bronzes, and pictures to Eudora, who took as much pleasure in examining and arranging the various articles as Mrs Gerome herself. There was one room in the flat, however, that was a mystery to the new comer—for, although it was a bedroom, it was furnished more handsomely than any of the other apartments—and, added to that, it was never used. The bed, which was a single one, was hung with the most delicate

blue silk taffetas and golden-brown velvet, and all the coverings and curtains were made to correspond. The tables and chairs were ebonised; the washing-stand inlaid with costly tiles, and, added to these luxuries, the walls were hung so thickly with paintings, that scarcely a yard of paper was visible; and a bookcase at one end of the room was filled with handsomely bound volumes of the current literature. But notwithstanding such signs of interest, the apartment and its contents seemed perfectly new, as if no one had ever slept in it. And what surprised Eudora more than anything else was the discovery that when the flat had been let, during Mrs Gerome's residence in Holyoak, this room had evidently been scrupulously locked up; for not only was every article such a mass of dust as proved it had not seen the light of day for a considerable time, but the door had to be unsealed before they could re-enter it. Eudora remarked somewhat curiously on this

circumstance to Mrs Squires, and asked her if it were not a pity to keep such handsome furniture locked away.

"I wonder Mrs Gerome does not occupy this room herself?" she continued; "it is by far the prettiest in the flat, isn't it, Mrs Squires? And if all that beautiful velvet and silk is not kept properly aired, it will certainly become infested by moths."

Hannah grunted forth a note of dissatisfaction.

"The mistress must have her own way about it," she said. "She has never slept in that room, and I don't suppose she ever will; though, as you say, miss, it is the best in the house, and her due, if it is anyone's."

"Is it the guest chamber—does Mrs Gerome keep it for her friends?" demanded Eudora, still inquisitively.

"More like for her enemies!" grumbled the servant, in a low tone. "Anyway, Miss Thane, her orders are that it's to

be kept aired, and left as it is. I'm sure I couldn't count the number of pairs of sheets as I've put on that bed and took off again—and all for nothing at all."

"It wants a thorough cleaning now, Mrs Squires. There is not a book in it but what is an inch deep in dust. Shall I set it all in order for you?"

"I'm sure I wish you would, miss, since you're so good as to make the offer, for I'd as lief touch snakes as anything in that room. If you'll wait till I've cleaned the windows, and swept the carpet, it'll be a real boon to get the rest off my hands."

So Eudora set the spare room to rights, and called Mrs Gerome's attention to its improved condition as soon as she returned home. The actress stood on the threshold, and sighed.

"Thank you, my dear girl—thank you so much. It looks beautiful—fit for a queen. You must have taken a great deal

of trouble about it. I hope it may not be all thrown away."

"How do you mean, 'thrown away,' dear Mrs Gerome?"

"I meant that I hope we may find someone to occupy it, dear, since you have set it in such perfect order. But I do not know—I hardly think that it is likely."

"You can have no time to attend to visitors when you are acting every night, Mrs Gerome?"

"No, Eudora; neither do I expect any. All my friends are very far away at present. But go, child, and shake that dust off you, and come for a walk in the park with me. The sight of this room has made me melancholy. We will take 'Monarch' for a run, and forget that we have seen it."

Eudora was puzzled by the actress's evident disinclination to examine the spare chamber, whilst she was so particular that it should be kept in perfect order; but

she did not question her any further on the subject. And she had sufficient proof before long that it was no affectation on Mrs Gerome's part, for she observed that she never crossed the threshold of that particular room, although she made constant inquiries as to whether the muslin hangings were renewed, and the bed kept aired, and everything ready for occupation at a moment's notice.

When the day arrived, however, for Mrs Gerome (or Miss Lushington, as she was professionally called) to make her appearance at the "Athenian," and Eudora was permitted to accompany her to the theatre, to help her in dressing, and to watch her occasionally from the wings, the girl forgot everything else in the pleasure and excitement of the occasion. It was an epoch in her existence, never again to be forgotten. The strange scenes to which she was introduced; the curious theatrical jargon which she overheard; the bustle

attendant on the production of a new piece; the clamour which assailed the appearance of the principal actress; all made an impression on her which remained to her dying day.

She felt herself honoured and proud to assist at the appearance of anyone so successful and popular as her dear Mrs Gerome, and took as lively an interest in the contents of her dressing-box, and the various pigments that she used, as if she were being initiated in the rudiments of a new science.

Mrs Gerome, however, was not always quite so agreeable whilst engaged in the exercise of her art as when she was in the domestic circle. None of us are perfect, and she was a woman of great nervousness and excitability. The very qualities which made her act well, and strung her up to the requirements of however difficult a task she had undertaken, were also apt to render her irritable, if she encountered

the slightest difficulty in the fulfilment of it. She would rush off the stage in a white heat after the finish of some tragical or passionate scene, and enter her dressing-room in a state of excitement that bordered on insanity. Then it would be that poor Eudora, standing ready with the next costume to be worn, would find herself thrust to one side, whilst Mrs Gerome, not waiting to be properly undressed, would wrench off buttons and break laces in her endeavours to get free, and impatiently scatter chalk, carmine, bismuth, and indian ink all over the floor.

At first the girl was frightened at these outbreaks, and feared she must have seriously offended her patroness, but after a while she perceived that they were only a necessary condition of the state of nervous tension into which the actress threw herself, and that really, for the time being, she did not know what she was about. And Mrs Gerome was always ready to make amends

for her vehemence as soon as the excitement was over.

"You mustn't take any notice of my tantrums, dear," she said one day, apologetically; "for I work myself up to such a pitch, I don't know what I am doing. Hannah will tell you that one day I threw a whole pot of carmine in her face—you never saw such an object as the poor thing looked, and I believe she would rather attend me anywhere but in my dressing-room. But you don't mind, do you, my dear? You must just look upon me as a lunatic for the time being, and let me throw the things about as I choose. It does me good, Eudora. I have not led a happy life, as you know, and thoughts come upon me so strongly sometimes (especially when on the stage), that I feel as if I was going out of my mind. Never take any notice of me—and if you would be my friend, try and forget it as quickly as I do."

"Do just as you like, and never mind me," said Eudora, in reply.

But she found it rather vexatious sometimes, nevertheless, to have to sew on buttons and darn rents, just because Mrs Gerome would not stand still one moment to have her dresses unfastened; or to spend half the evening in picking up articles from the floor, which had been sacrificed as victims to her fury. But she had one great compensation for any trial to her patience — one which she would not have exchanged for any amount of ease and comfort, and that was, watching Mrs Gerome play from the wings. She could not have done it, had she attended her in any other capacity, for the rules of the "Athenian" were as strict as those of most theatres; but the actress was subject to cold, and compelled to wear some very airy dresses, therefore it became a necessity that someone should wait with a warm wrap for her to put on directly she left the stage.

And by this means Eudora remained at the wings almost every evening, and had

the advantage of seeing Mrs Gerome play the same parts several times in succession. Only to watch her was a valuable lesson to an intelligent mind, for the actress was clever in the extreme, and a mistress of her art. Every pose had been deliberately thought out beforehand; she never moved hand nor foot without a reason for it; and the play of her features was a study in itself.

Before Eudora had attended her to the theatre for many nights, she learned that she was considered one of the finest comedy actresses in the profession, and she felt proud to be associated (however humbly) with so celebrated and popular a personage. Directly Mrs Gerome put her foot upon the stage, she was greeted with acclamations and applause from every part of the house, and after every scene, the audience compelled her to appear and receive their acknowledgments of her talent.

Eudora, who had never entered the doors of a theatre before, became fairly intoxi-

cated with the incense offered to her friend, and was astonished to find that Mrs Gerome cared so little for it.

"I should die with joy, if I were you!" she exclaimed one night, enthusiastically. "I feel as if I could slave all my life at the most menial labour, if I could only stand once before the public and receive such a welcome as you have done this evening."

Mrs Gerome was standing before the glass disrobing as Eudora said this. She bent her head suddenly over her dressing-box, and the girl saw two big tears fall from her beautiful eyes, and splash upon its polished surface. And her delicacy made her turn away, and profess, whilst looking for the actress's shoes, to forget the subject, which she seemed to have been unfortunate in mentioning.

One evening, as she was waiting as usual at the wings, with her eyes fixed upon every movement of her friend, she

was surprised to see her waver in her part. She was playing "The Jealous Wife," a piece which Eudora had seen several times before, and of which she knew every line. She was, therefore, perfectly aware of what ought to come next, and as perfectly aware that Mrs Gerome was what is technically termed "drying-up."

She had reached a most important part of the comedy—a crisis where the whole action of the play depended on the rapidity of her repartee—yet she faltered—hesitated—stopped—and then, finding she had missed her cue, made a great effort to recover herself, and supplied the deficiency with some words of her own.

The audience did not detect the "gag," but Eudora did, and wondered at the reason. Was Mrs Gerome ill? She could not see her complexion through her war paint, but she remarked that her hands were trembling, and her gait seemed unsteady

Full of apprehension, Eudora was even more watchful than usual to be ready to meet Mrs Gerome as she left the stage, but, to her surprise, instead of waiting as usual to put on her woollen shawl, the actress rushed past her at the wings to her own dressing-room. Eudora ran after her as quickly as she could, but what was her surprise, on reaching it, to find her kneeling on the floor, with her arms flung across a chair, sobbing as if her heart would break. She had never seen Mrs Gerome give way to any violent emotion before, and the sight alarmed her. Something terrible must surely have occurred to make this proud, determined, and courageous woman break down in so unusual a manner.

"Oh! Mrs Gerome," she exclaimed, "what *is* the matter? Are you ill?"

The actress turned round upon her roughly.

"Leave the room," she said, in an im-

perious voice. "Leave me to myself. I want no spies upon my privacy."

At these words Eudora shrunk backwards, no less wounded in her affections than her pride, and shut the door behind her. But she would not go away. She mounted guard outside of the closed portal, sure that her friend must be very ill or very miserable, and determined that no one else should witness her discomfiture. She had stood there, for perhaps ten minutes, when she heard Mrs Gerome's voice, so different in tone from what it sounded last—call her by her name. She opened the door softly and crept in.

"Eudora, my child," exclaimed the actress, "forgive me!"

"Oh! Mrs Gerome, there is nothing to forgive."

"Yes, there is, everything—when misery can make us forget what is due to our best friends. But don't let us talk of it any more. Forgive me, and help me to dress for the second act."

She turned and regarded herself in the glass as she spoke. Her face, which had been carefully made up, was streaked and ruddled by her heavy tears; her black patches had been moistened through, and changed their original places; she looked more like a clown than a fascinating woman. Her facile temperament caught the ludicrous side of the situation at once, and she burst into a peal of laughter.

"Heavens! look at my face; like a zebra in a fit! Well, I *am* a fool to have ruined my work like this. It certainly was not worth the trouble. Eudora, my dear, I am sorry to say I shall have to 'make up' all over again. This is a misfortune that admits of no compromise. Give me the cold cream and the towel, and let me efface the ravages of the destroyer as quickly as I can. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what fools we women are!"

"I thought you prided yourself, Mrs

Gerome, on being above the ordinary weaknesses of our sex."

"So I do, my dear, as a rule, and my pride has had a fall. But let us attend strictly to business. That white brocade is for the second act, and I will wear the Elizabethan ruff with the pearls. Just move my wig, Eudora, it will be in the carmine in another minute. And tell the dresser to fetch me a bottle of soda water. Nothing refreshes me like soda water after I have had a good cry. It's pure nervousness, Eudora, nothing but nervousness and fatigue. Oh dear! what a fool I am!"

Eudora, bustling about after dress and wig and soda water, had hardly leisure to carp at Mrs Gerome's statement, but when the actress had gone on the stage again, and she had time to reflect, she could not help doubting whether her emotion had been entirely due to the causes to which she attributed it.

Nervousness and fatigue! When had Mrs Gerome ever seemed nervous (in that way) or fatigued in the pursuit of her business? She possessed the constitution and energy of a horse, with a spirit to back it that made her capable of any amount of physical exertion. Besides, even if she were tired, her pride would have prevented her breaking down in public.

Eudora felt that if she wished to unfold the mystery, she must look somewhere else for its solution; but as she stood at the wings, and regarded the house, she could see nothing there to account for her friend's emotion. The "Athenian" was packed from pit to gallery, but that was nothing new. It was full every night, and as Eudora's eyes roved over the stalls, and boxes, and dress circle, and met the sea of faces turned towards she stage, she thought how impossible it must be in such a vast assembly to distinguish one set of features from another. She watched Mrs Gerome

anxiously to the conclusion of the play, but there was no occasion for her alarm. The actress went through the remainder of her task perfectly, and the curtain came down to the usual applause. Neither did Mrs Gerome again allude to her emotion, or the cause of it. She dressed herself rather more hurriedly than she was wont to do, and seemed eager to gain her carriage and drive home as soon as possible. But when she reached the flat, though Mrs Squires had prepared a tempting supper of lobster curry and devilled kidneys, her mistress went straight to bed, without touching either of them. Hannah attended her to her room, and then returning to the supper table, accosted Eudora with a very good imitation of Mrs Gerome's determined manner.

"What's the matter with my lady to-night, Miss Thane?"

"I am sure I can't tell you, Mrs Squires. She was very much upset by something

this evening at the theatre, but she did not confide the reason to me, and I had no right to ask."

"Did no one come behind the scenes and talk to her?"

"I saw no one—no stranger, that is to say."

"No gentleman! no foreign-looking chap, with black eyes, and a long nose, and a face like a tallow candle?"

"No! indeed! I should have been sure to remember, if I had."

"It is not like the mistress, to come home with puffed cheeks, and red eyes, and no appetite. She doesn't do it once in a blue moon, but when she does, I know the symptoms and the cause of them, and if it happens again, I shall have to take your place, Miss Thane, and go to the theatre with her. For I won't have her worried!" exclaimed Mrs Squires, energetically, as she brought down her hand on the table, "not for all the jack-a-napes in the world—that I won't!"

"But, Hannah," said Eudora, earnestly, forgetting the more formal appellation, in her desire to aid her friend, "neither will I, if you will only tell me who I am to keep away from her."

Mrs Squires feared she had gone too far.

"No! my dear! it's of no consequence! I'm vexed and put out, and I'm afraid I've been talking a bit too fast. If the mistress don't tell you her private affairs, it's no business of mine to be blabbing them. But mark my words, Miss Thane, this upset is the beginning of troubles. I feel as sure of it as that my name is Hannah Squires."

CHAPTER IV.

"THAT 'S MRS GEROME'S HUSBAND."

NOTWITHSTANDING Mrs Squires's prophecy, the troubles did not put in a speedy appearance. The next morning was bright and sunshiny, and Mrs Gerome was as bright and sunshiny as the morning, and seemed to have entirely forgotten her annoyance of the night before. Indeed, she was merrier than usual over her lesson with Eudora, and told the girl that she was getting on so fast, she should soon try to make some use of her.

"My position at the 'Athenian,' and, indeed, in the theatrical world generally, is

so well assured, that I should find it easy at any time to introduce a pupil, for small parts. And that is what I intend shortly to do with you, Eudora. I shall get you put on at the 'Athenian,' at any salary they will pay me for your services, in order that you may gain some stage experience; and I shall confiscate your earnings, so that, instead of paying you (as I ought to do) for the time and trouble you spend upon me, I shall actually be paid for being so good as to employ you. And then I hope your heart will be at rest concerning the enormous obligation under which I lay you," said Mrs Gerome, with a hearty laugh.

"*Never*," replied Eudora; "I can never acknowledge that it is repaid, although I may feel a little happier on the subject, when I know that I am of use to you. But your kindness, your affection, to me—if I worked for you all my life, I would never give you back one tithe of what you have given me."

"Silly child!" sighed Mrs Gerome; "I think I can remember a time when I held just such romantic notions myself, but as you grow older they will wear off. You will live, Eudora—that is, if you live at all—to find that the least you give others is, generally speaking, more than they have given you. You will pour out your life's blood for them, or be prepared to do it, and they will reward you with a sigh or a sentimental tear; you will be ready to follow them round the world upon your bended knees, and they will consider your devotion amply rewarded if they go half-a-mile to meet you. You have too warm a heart, my child; Keep it warm if you will, but don't let it boil over. You will only burn your fingers, and the world won't thank you for the sacrifice, nor help you to allay the pain."

"Dear Mrs Gerome! you seem to me to be at warfare with the world."

"No, Eudora! it is not worth the trouble; but I have a very hearty contempt for it;

which a knowledge of your own history has not lessened. In one particular, we are admirably fitted to be friends. The world has used neither of us well. So, bring out the lesson-books, and let me teach you how to set its cruelty at defiance. We will pit art and industry against the enemy, and see if they cannot put it to the rout. Come! let me hear you recite the potion scene from 'Romeo and Juliet.' You will never play 'Juliet,' Eudora—at least, I hope you will never be such a fool as to attempt it, for it is not at all in your line—but when we sit down to learn, we should fly at the highest, and then the lowest may come easy to us. So, spout away, Miss Juliet, and if I can restrain my unholy laughter, I will."

"I don't mind your laughing at me, Mrs Gerome, because I know it is all in kindness."

"My dear, I should laugh at myself just as much, that is, in the character of 'Juliet.' Many people fail, Eudora,

from attempting, not to soar too high, but entirely in a wrong direction. Each of us has his own proclivity, and our aim should be to do, not what we *wish* to do, but what we *can* do. Now, what you can do, my dear (or rather will be able to do), is light comedy. Your face, figure, and style are all adapted to it, so don't you be so silly (if you should be left to your own guidance) as to let any one persuade you to attempt tragedy or melo-drama, because you would be a dead failure in either of them."

"Dear Mrs Gerome, why do you speak of my being left to my own guidance. You are not going to send me away again?" cried Eudora, in alarm.

"No, no, child! what an extraordinary idea! But I am not immortal, although I mean to live as long as I can. Yet, if death *should* separate us—"

Eudora interrupted her friend's speech, with a burst of tears. She had never

realised till that moment how dear Mrs Gerome had become to her, nor how she would suffer if they were compelled to part. The actress was scarcely less affected than her young companion, but she made a resolute effort to restrain any exhibition of her feelings.

"Come, come, Eudora," she said quickly, "we have no time to waste on sentiment. We are not going to leave each other yet awhile, please God, and when the time comes, we will bear it like women who have learned that death is one of the least evils humanity affords us. Pick up your book, my dear, I will read Juliet's soliloquy to you, and, by the time I have finished it, I hope you will be composed enough to go on yourself."

It was one of Mrs Gerome's most prominent customs to crush anything like weak emotion or sentimentality in the bud. She averred that it was a bad habit, of which every woman with sense could cure herself,

and that, left unchecked, it rendered her unfit to take her place in the world as a responsible being. Her own sudden fall from this high estate, therefore, had puzzled Eudora even more than it had distressed her, and though she never alluded to the subject again, she did not forget, nor cease to wonder at the occasion in the theatre when Mrs Gerome had proved herself to be no stronger than the rest of her feeble sex.

One morning after breakfast, as Eudora sat alone at the dining-room, poring over her elocution book, she heard a double knock sound on the outer door of the flat. Mrs Gerome was at the theatre, attending the rehearsal of a new piece, and Hannah had gone out to do the day's marketing; so the girl rose, as a matter of course, and went to answer the door. Mrs Gerome seldom had any visitors, and never at that hour of the day. She did not anticipate, therefore, having to do

more than take in a message or a parcel. But to her surprise a gentleman was waiting on the threshold for admittance; a pleasant, suave looking gentleman, of about forty years of age, perfectly dressed, even at that early hour of the morning, and with a taking smile that made one feel inclined to trust him on the spot. Eudora liked his appearance vastly, and he seemed also to like hers, as, indeed, was only natural, for she was very pretty in her fresh print dress and coquettish apron, with her beautiful rust-coloured hair waving about her temples and the nape of her neck.

"Is Miss Lushington at home?" demanded the stranger, with his eyes fixed on Eudora's blushing face.

"No, she is not," replied the girl. "Have you any message for her?"

"I have come to see her, and will wait for her return," he said confidently, as he crossed the threshold.

Eudora felt uneasy. She did not like the idea of being shut up in the flat alone with a perfect stranger, and perhaps it was someone whom Mrs Gerome did not wish to see. What was she to do?

"But," she commenced, hesitatingly, "Miss Lushington will not be home for a long time perhaps—and the servant is out—and would it not be better if you called again?"

"I am afraid you must allow me to be the judge of that," he said, as he hung up his hat in the hall, and deposited his umbrella in the stand; "I have come some distance, and should not have time to make a second visit. But, pray, be under no apprehension. I am an old friend of Miss Lushington, and will make it all right with her."

So saying, the stranger walked into the dining-room, and ensconced himself comfortably in an arm-chair.

Eudora followed him, not knowing what

to do. The gentleman might not be what he represented himself; he might be a dun, or a beggar for some charitable institution, or even — terrible thought — a member of the swell mob. But he had entered the flat, and Eudora could not put him out again, and, being a sensible girl, saw that her best plan was not to lose sight of him. So she sat down quietly in her old place, and took up her lesson book. But the stranger had no intention of remaining silent.

"Are you in the profession, my dear?" he inquired presently; "I see that you are studying *Bell's Elocution.*"

Eudora shook her head.

"But you are designed for it, I suppose? You are a pupil of Miss Lushington. Is it not the case?"

"She is kind enough to teach me, but I have not been on the stage yet."

"Ah! but you will before long; and, with your face and figure, you should

cut an appearance there. What age are you?"

"Eighteen," replied Eudora, thinking that the stranger's curiosity sounded very much like impertinence.

"I could give you a much better engagement than Miss Lushington will ever help you to. She will only put you on the stage as a super—to hand her a letter, or be made a butt for her irony; but I should place you in the front at once, where you could be both seen and heard, and make a name for yourself."

"Are you a manager, then?" demanded Eudora, surprise taking the place of her rising indignation.

"I am, and the manager of as fine a comedy and burlesque company as ever travelled through the provinces. The young ladies in my troupe are noted for their beauty and ability. It is quite sufficient to be known to have travelled with me to secure any girl a footing on

the London boards. And we have so much variety, too—changing our theatres every week, and journeying in a party from one place to another. It is like belonging to a large family to serve under me. We are all as happy together as brothers and sisters."

"It must be very pleasant," said Eudora, trying to fix her attention on her book.

"And my young ladies get such good salaries into the bargain, and so many presents," continued the stranger. "There was not one of them that did not come out in a sealskin cloak last winter. But that is only natural, with their advantages. What handsome young women require is to be seen, and the rest soon follows. Now, my girls are all seen; I take good care they shall be, and the consequence is that they are made pets of wherever they go."

The strange gentleman here spoke truly, for if Eudora Thane had only known what

a considerable amount of his young ladies he took care should be seen, she would have shrunk from further conversation with him. As it was, his voice, and look, and manner made her uneasy, and she returned some confused answer that showed very little interest in his communication. The stranger concluded that Miss Lushington's pupil must be dull. He yawned and fidgetted, and crossed and uncrossed his legs, and asked if there was such a thing as a morning paper in the house.

"Miss Lushington has the *Times* every morning, but I think she has taken it to the theatre with her," replied Eudora, raising her eyes for a moment from her book.

"Then, my dear, I must ask you to get me a cup of coffee, for I've come out without my breakfast, and I begin to feel confoundedly peckish."

But this Eudora would not do without permission.

"I have no command of the larder," she said; "and I doubt if it is even unlocked. If you wish for any breakfast, you must be good enough to wait till Mrs Squires comes home, and then she will doubtless get you some."

"*Squires!* Is that old hag here still?" the stranger muttered beneath his breath, but Eudora made him no answer, and silence once more reigned between them. At last, to her great relief, she heard Hannah's latchkey turn in the front door, and ran to meet her in the passage."

"Oh! Mrs Squires, there is a gentle- here waiting to see Mrs Gerome. He came half-an-hour ago, and he would come in; and he is in the dining-room, and says he wants a newspaper and his breakfast. What are we to do?"

At this intelligence, Hannah's face grew very stern.

"A gentleman?" she echoed. "Let me see him. I'll soon tell if he is to have

breakfast here or not," and with that she marched up to the open dining-room door, and stood on the threshold, like a grim sentinel, without greeting or obeisance.

"Well?" said the stranger, looking up.

"My mistress is not at home, sir," replied Hannah Squires.

"So I have heard. But I presume she *will* be at home some time, either of the night or day. Meanwhile, bring me some coffee, with a dash of brandy in it. I cannot fast until luncheon time."

"Very good, sir," returned the servant, as she went into her little kitchen.

Eudora was astonished by the humility of her manner. She had expected to hear her give the stranger "a bit of her mind" (as she was fond of expressing it), but she had calmly acceded to his request, without any dispute whatever.

Hannah's face, it is true, had turned very yellow, and her hands shook as she worked the handle of the coffee-mill, but

she set about the preparations for breakfast without another word.

"Who is he?" whispered Eudora, as she followed Mrs Squires into the kitchen. "Have I done wrong in letting him remain?"

"Oh! no! Miss Thane, you couldn't have done otherwise, and Mrs Gerome wouldn't have had you do otherwise, into the bargain. He's an old friend of hers, my dear—and she'll be here before long, and able to see after him herself."

"Need I go back to the dining-room, Hannah? I don't like the way he looks at me."

"Not a bit of it, Miss Thane. Go to your bedroom if you like it better. If people force themselves into a house at inconvenient times, they must take the consequences."

So Eudora retired to her own room, whence, after a while, hearing Mrs Gerome's somewhat noisy entrance, she emerged to

tell her the news. But she was too late to intercept her view of the stranger, who still sat in the dining-room, with the door open.

Hannah was busy at the moment in her little scullery, and her mistress walked straight to the dining-room door. As Eudora first caught sight of her, she was leaning against the lintel, without a vestige of colour in her face. The girl was too much startled to address her. She saw at once that a crisis was at hand.

"Well?" said the stranger, jauntily, in precisely the same tone as he had used to Hannah Squires.

Mrs Gerome made a violent effort to recover herself.

"What have you come here for?" she said, huskily.

"That's a nice question to ask a man from whom you've been separated for a twelvemonth. We should have met before this, my dear, if I had only known where

you were hiding yourself—but your discretion in that respect outrivals anything I have ever seen. As soon as the press announced your return to London, however, you must surely have expected to see yours truly. Come! it's no use looking as if I were unwelcome. I've travelled all the way from Bath to see you, and I must request the honour of a few minutes' serious conversation."

"You can have nothing to say to me that I have not already heard and answered to," replied Mrs Gerome. "I told you, on the last occasion of our meeting, that there was one condition only on which we could renew even terms of friendship with each other, and that condition has not been fulfilled. You had no right to force your way into my presence, whilst things remain on their former footing."

"If I came here on any plea but that of business, I might admit the force of your argument, but as my motive in seeing you

to-day is purely mercenary, you will acquit me of seeking you on false pretences."

"When have your motives regarding me been anything but mercenary?" she answered, with a curled lip. "Have you failed in business? What is it that you want of me?"

"Well! I can't say that my business has been altogether satisfactory this year; or that a few hundreds would not come in handy. If you will come in, and shut the door, I will be more explicit with you."

"Is that girl's name out of your bill yet?" demanded Mrs Gerome, curtly.

"What girl?"

"You know as well as I. The girl who calls herself Elsie Angel. No money of mine shall ever go to keep her before the public. I have said so before, and I repeat it."

"She is certainly still in the company. Whilst you refuse to help me, I can hardly afford to dismiss her, as she is about the only one who draws grist to the mill.

But that is all. The girl is no more to me than—than—you are: and if you will make it worth my while, I will give her notice to-morrow."

"Is that a bargain?"

"Certainly! I have said it!"

"We will at least then talk the matter over," replied Mrs Gerome, with a heavy sigh, as she entered the dining-room and closed the door.

Eudora had remained in the passage all this time, too much astonished to move or to make her presence known. But as the actress disappeared, she crept back to her own room, and sat there for another hour, trying to think what the meaning of this extraordinary scene could be. At the end of that time, Hannah passing her door, tapped at it, with an intimation that she had carried luncheon into the dining-room, and Eudora, concluding that the mysterious stranger had taken his departure, smoothed her dress

and hair, and ran quickly into the presence of her dear Mrs Gerome. But to her surprise the visitor was there still, and apparently very much at home, whilst Mrs Gerome, with a flushed and perturbed countenance, sat at some distance from him, looking idly out of the window. As Eudora entered, however, she glanced kindly at her, and held out her hand.

"This is a pupil of mine, Henry," she said to the stranger; "let me introduce you to her,—Mr Carrington—Miss Thorne." (For it had been agreed between Mrs Gerome and Eudora that the latter should be known professionally and for the future by the name of Thorne, in order that none of her friends might recognise or worry her.)

"Miss Thorne and I have already had the pleasure of an introduction," said Mr Carrington, briskly; "she was good enough to entertain me on my first arrival. She is an excellent guardian of your interests, Nell. She wouldn't give me a cup of

coffee for love or money—would you Miss Thorne?"

"I could not give you what was not my own, without Mrs Gerome's permission," returned Eudora, gravely; "and I did not even know if you were what you represented yourself to be."

"Dear me! the young lady is discretion itself. You bring up your pupils uncommonly well, Nell—so well, indeed, that I should have no objection to take this one off your hands. I have been telling her already what a happy family party we are, and what a number of nice girls she would have to associate with, if she accepted an engagement in my company. I don't think any one need be ashamed of seeing her name in such a list as this," he continued, taking a roll of paper from his pocket, "nor on such a playbill. It is considered to be about the prettiest poster in the provinces."

He threw the paper, unfolded, on the

table as he spoke, and displayed an attractive picture of a group of young ladies, with very little on, lying down or leaning on each other, in the most seductive attitudes. Mrs Gerome's eyes literally blazed with fury.

"Don't dare to mention such a thing in my house!" she said, angrily. "Miss Thorne neither wishes to see your poster, nor join your company; and if you attempt to seduce her from my protection, by the offer of an engagement, you never darken my doors again."

"Hey day! here's a commotion," cried Mr Carrington, quickly; "one would think I had been insulting this young lady, instead of paying her what most people would consider a compliment. When ladies go in for the stage, they usually desire to get an engagement; and I should give Miss Thorne very good terms, much better than she will get under your introduction, for years to come."

"And so you need for the work you'd want her to do," retorted the actress, as she drew Eudora closer to her side; "but you have mistaken your lead this time, Henry. Miss Thorne is a gentlewoman by birth and education, and would no more associate with the 'young ladies' to whom you would introduce her, than she would with the stage carpenters."

"She is a deuced pretty girl," returned Mr Carrington; "and I saw that at a glance."

"And whilst you remain here, you will have to treat her with the respect due to her position," continued Mrs Gerome, sternly. "I will not have my pupil insulted, either by word or manner; and if I am to fall in with your wishes, you cannot learn that too soon."

"Oh! very well," he replied coolly, as he rolled up the poster, and thrust it into his pocket; "we won't mention the subject again, and Miss Thorne may rest assured I shall never address her but in the language

of a gentleman! When do you intend to bring her out, and in what character?"

"It is not decided," said Mrs Gerome.

"I should like to know when it is likely to occur, that I may be present at her *début*. I take a great interest in first appearances, but my business precludes my visiting London often. This is the first time I have been in town this year, Nell."

"That is not true," she answered shortly; "for I saw you in the theatre three weeks ago."

He coloured and looked conscious.

"Yes! well—I *did* look in for a moment," he stammered; "hearing you had made your reappearance, and being anxious to see you after so long a separation."

Mrs Gerome's lips curled.

"And Miss Angel was with you," she went on, mercilessly.

"You must have sharp eyes," said Mr Carrington, with an uneasy laugh. "Are you sure it was not her mother—or mine?"

"She is not a person to be easily mistaken," replied Mrs Gerome, "considering you might dig the paint off her face with a spade, and she dyes her hair the colour of a sunflower."

"Are you not rather hard?" he demanded in a low voice.

"I am not so hard as I intend to be," she answered in her usual tone.

At this juncture Mrs Squires appeared with some further addition to the luncheon, and put an end to the conversation. The servant glanced anxiously at her mistress two or three times, before she left the room again, but she could gain no information from the expression of her face. But when the meal had been for some time concluded, and Eudora, having left Mrs Gerome and Mr Carrington together, had joined Mrs Squires in the kitchen, and was helping her in some household work, the actress came in to them both with a flushed face and an

excited manner, and as if she was rather ashamed of what she was about to say. She sat down, and got up, and fluttered about the kitchen, as though to worry Hannah into asking what was the matter. But Hannah was adamant. She simply moved out of Mrs Gerome's way whenever she came near her, and went on with her folding and ironing. At last her mistress was compelled to speak.

"Hannah, you must put sheets on the bed in the spare room to-night."

"What for?" demanded the maid stoutly.

"He will sleep here."

Mrs Squires gave vent to an audible grunt of dissatisfaction.

"Don't be nasty about it, Hannah. He is not in town for long, and it will be a convenience to him, and I could hardly refuse—now could I?"

"I'm sure I don't know, ma'am. I know nothing, except the sooner he is

out of town again, and back with that nice company of his, the better."

"But he has given me his word of honour that he will alter that, Hannah—at least, the part of it that gives me pain, and you wouldn't have me turn against a man that wishes to reform—would you?"

At the word "reform" Mrs Squires gave vent to a sardonic laugh.

"You don't believe in him, I know," continued the actress; "but I assure you he is in earnest this time. He has experienced heavy losses in business, and I have made my own stipulations as the condition of my helping him out of them. Of course, he will continue his management, with certain alterations, but he will be more in town than formerly; and as I am the richer of the two, and the spare room is vacant, and—"

"Oh! certainly, ma'am, certainly! Do just as you think fit about it," rejoined Mrs Squires, with a toss of the head.

"Well, I should be sorry to have your suspicious nature, Hannah. You would never give anyone the chance of retrieving his character. And his presence here (for however long or short a time it may be) will make no difference whatever to any of us. You know that he is always out, or at his clubs, the best part of the day. I don't suppose we shall ever see him after the breakfast hour; and so I cannot understand why you need be so put out at the idea of his sleeping here."

"I ain't put out, ma'am — not a bit," replied Mrs Squires, as she banged the flat iron on the fire. "The rooms is yours, and not mine, and I've no right to complain if you puts a rhinoceros in them."

"Come, he's not quite so bad as that," said Mrs Gerome, with a sort of fitful smile, and in a very uncertain voice, as she left the kitchen again.

Eudora had not ventured to interrupt this conversation with any questions, but

now that the stranger was about to take up his residence with them, she felt she had a right to ask who and what he was.

"Is Mr Carrington going to live in the flat, Mrs Squires?" she inquired, in a tone of dismay.

"So it seems, miss, from the mistress's orders," replied Hannah, sulkily.

"But *why?* Is he any relation to her?"

Hannah stopped her ironing to look into Eudora's face.

"Bless your heart, miss! can't you guess? He ain't no relation, but he's the very worst of connections as the poor mistress ever entered into. Why! his name ain't no more Carrington than your's—that's Mrs Gerome's husband — Henry Gerome — and the worst husband as ever a poor woman took the name of."

"Is it really! How silly of me not to guess it before! But, Mrs Squires, I thought they never saw each other! Mr

Gerome was the last person I expected to meet here."

"And I wish he *had* been, Miss Thane, for trouble follows his footsteps wherever they may go. Didn't I tell you it was coming, the night she was so upset in the theatre? And here it is, in the shape of Mr Gerome—drat his ugly face! I wish we had stayed our lives at Holyoak, before he'd found us out again."

CHAPTER V.

"CHILD, DON'T YOU KNOW ME?"

NOTHING seemed to go so well, nor so happily, in Eudora's opinion, after Mr Gerome took up his residence in the little flat. It was true that he was not often there. He spent all his days, and many of his nights abroad, but he always managed to be present at the very time when she wanted to be alone with his wife. And yet he was by no means an unpleasant person to live with.

He would appear at the breakfast table, clad in the most impossible of dressing-

gowns, and far-fetched of smoking caps, and salute the ladies as courteously as if they had been mere acquaintances. He never complained of any food that was placed before him, but at the same time he never spared it, nor failed to make himself as perfectly at home as if he were the master of the house, and everything contained in it, which in these days of feminine liberation he decidedly was not.

And to Eudora's intense annoyance, he persisted in being present at her elocution lessons. She felt sometimes as if she could do nothing, and say nothing, whilst his keen dark eyes were fixed upon her; but Mrs Gerome, so indulgent in most things, would not give in to her in this. She told her that Mr Gerome represented the public, before which she was so soon to appear; and it was an excellent thing for her to get used to his criticism, whilst at the same time he was so clever and experienced an actor himself that she might

gain some valuable hints from his remarks. So poor Eudora had to plod on, blushing and stumbling over every line, until mere custom gave her confidence, and she recited quite as well in Mr Gerome's presence as out of it.

But after a few weeks he grew tired of having even his breakfast at the flat, and disappeared from London for a week altogether, after which his residence with them seemed to be permanently broken up, and he only visited his wife at intervals, dashing in unexpectedly at luncheon or dinner, and with very little account to give of his proceedings. He was still on tour with his company, but his dates were very uncertainly filled up, and he sometimes remained in town for a week together.

Eudora was very glad when he had once more started management; for Mrs Gerome had not been the same woman whilst he remained with them. Her temper had become fitful and uncertain; and she

had often given way to moods of depression, or to false merriment, which was still more painful to hear. She seemed to return more to her former self, when he had started on tour again, though his visit had left a sort of feverish excitement behind it, which kept her continually on the *qui vive*, and Eudora often saw her eyes, whilst on the stage, roving restlessly round the house, for some sign of his presence in the stalls or boxes. On the whole, the girl was very sorry that Mr Gerome had ever put in an appearance, and sincerely hoped that they had seen the last of him.

Meanwhile, she made her first bow to the public, and her desire to become a professional actress was accomplished. It was a very small and modest *début*, and in a very small and modest part, but the papers noticed it as promising, and Mrs Gerome told her pupil she was proud of her.

Luckily for Eudora, the days of infini-

tesimally extended "runs" had not yet commenced. She had, therefore, at least weekly a fresh character to sustain; and soon gained both confidence and experience. She was not a genius, to take the world by storm, nor a beauty, to fill the stalls with crutch and toothpick; but she satisfied her manager and her patroness, and so she felt her ambition had, for the present, attained its object.

Mrs Gerome was at that time appearing in a series of comedies, and apparently in the full flush of health and spirits. Eudora, therefore, was the more surprised one morning to hear her say that she felt unequal to playing that evening, and desired her to take a note at once to the manager to say so. Mrs Gerome had just been opening some letters that had arrived by the post at the time, and looked anxious and worried, but otherwise she seemed to be in her usual health. Eudora's affection took instant alarm.

"Dear Mrs Gerome, are you ill? Have you not slept well? Why did you not call me? I have begged you so often to let me know when you require anything."

"My dear child, I slept like a top, and there is nothing very much the matter with me. Only, I don't feel up to the mark, and I do think when an artist has worked as hard and for as many years as I have, that she is occasionally entitled to take a few hours' rest. Besides, they can manage very well without me. Miss Morval is perfectly equal to playing my part in the 'Love Chase,' and all they will have to do will be to announce the fact. I have written a note to the manager, Eudora, and if you will deliver it to him, I shall be obliged. And I shall lie down whilst you are away, for my head aches, and I want to rest and think."

"Dear Mrs Gerome, I am afraid you do too much thinking already. It is acting,

on the top of all your domestic worry, that knocks you up."

"That is unavoidable, my dear. There is not an artist on the stage, nor in any profession, but what is obliged to work on the top (as you call it) of his domestic troubles. For who is without them? Only, occasionally, I allow that they press more hardly than usual, and, then, if we are able to lay up for a few hours, why shouldn't we do it?"

"I was sure you had been worried," replied Eudora, with an affectionate kiss, as she departed on her mission to the theatre.

The manager was anything but pleased at Miss Lushington's defalcation, but there was a clause in their agreement which prevented his refusing her request, so he had to put the best face he could on the matter.

"I suppose we shall see you, Miss Thorne," he remarked to Eudora; "you are not going to play us false as well as Miss Lushington."

"Oh, no! I shall be here as usual," replied the girl, as she hurried homewards.

But she could not understand Mrs Gerome for the rest of that day at all. The actress insisted that she had a nervous headache, that required rest and silence, and locked herself into her own room in consequence; yet Eudora could hear her moving about more than once during the afternoon, and opening and shutting her wardrobe drawers.

To use anything like a subterfuge was so completely foreign to Mrs Gerome's nature, which was too courageous to be otherwise than frank, that her unusual conduct caused her young companion some uneasiness, and she felt it still more when she heard that Mrs Squires was going home that evening to visit her friends at Battersea.

"Going all the way to Battersea! Hannah," she exclaimed; "and when Mrs Gerome is so unwell! I cannot understand it. Surely you do not intend to leave her alone in the flat whilst I am at the theatre!

I should have thought that was the last thing you would do."

"Well, Miss Thane, you may suppose that I am not going of my own free will. The fact is, the mistress and me have fought over it for the best part of an hour. But you know what she is, miss. She will have her own way. And she insists that she'll be a deal better if we leave her quite alone; and I'm to give her a cup of coffee at six o'clock; and then I'm to go to Battersea; and it would be as much as my place is worth to oppose her wishes when she's once expressed them."

"It is very unaccountable," sighed Eudora, "and it makes me very uneasy; however, I suppose she knows best. After all, I shall not be absent more than a couple of hours, and I shall hurry home from the theatre as fast as ever I can."

Agreeably to this determination, Eudora made as much haste with her undressing when the play was over as if her life de-

pended on her rapidity. She had not seen Mrs Gerome again before she left home, but she had knocked at her closed door to tell her she was going, and received an answer which was delivered in a very faint and sleepy voice. But Eudora could not feel easy about her, notwithstanding. Visions of all sorts of unlikely accidents and disasters floated through her mind during the performance, and sadly distracted it from the work in hand, and as soon as it was possible for mortal fingers to accomplish the deed, she was dressed in her ordinary clothes again, and driving back to the flat. It was situated up three or four flights of stairs, and Eudora was out of breath as she opened the first door and ran in. The gas was burning in every nook and corner, but the flat was empty. When the girl had entered Mrs Gerome's bedroom, the door of which stood open, and seen the confusion in which it had been left, a great sense of misfortune

smote her heart, and she sat down and cried bitterly.

"I was *sure* there was something wrong," she said to herself; "all the evening I have been thinking of elopements and suicides, and all kinds of horrors. Oh! what *can* have become of her? What has that horrid man driven her to do? She used to be so bright and cheerful before she met him again."

Even as she said the words, the sound of a step in the passage made her first start and then rise to meet it. She had been so certain that it could only be Mrs Gerome that she was quite taken aback by encountering the figure of an old lady, with grey hair, who stood staring at her with apparently as much astonishment as she felt herself.

"These are private rooms," said Eudora, authoritatively, "and you cannot enter them. What do you want here? You must have mistaken the door."

Still the old woman stood there, and stared at her as if uncertain what to say. She was a very respectable looking person, and attired like a gentlewoman, though in an old-fashioned and somewhat dowdy manner. But she appeared to have some difficulty in finding her tongue. Eudora thought she might be deaf, and raised her voice.

"This flat belongs to Mrs Gerome. If you have no business with her, you must please to go out of it."

"To Mrs Gerome, my dear! That's Miss Lushington the actress, isn't it? Oh! I know her well. A great, coarse, painted, over-dressed thing; a perfect disgrace to her sex and the world at large."

Eudora felt as if she could have knocked the old woman down.

"How *dare* you speak of Mrs Gerome in that manner? Hold your tongue, and leave this place. The very way in which you mention her proves to me that you

have never even seen her. If you don't go at once I will put you out with my own hands;" and Eudora advanced menacingly upon the intruder.

"Hoity toity, young woman, and pray, who are you to take such airs upon yourself? I suppose you'll be telling me you're a respectable person next. But, as I am here, it will go hard with me but I'll have a look at the great Miss Lushington's bedroom. I may learn a wrinkle or two from what I see there."

And with these words the stranger darted past Eudora, and entered Mrs Gerome's room. The girl was indignant. She rushed after her, seized her by the wrist, and was about to summarily eject her from the premises when a loud peal of familiar laughter foiled her intention.

"Child, don't you know me? You'll break my arm!" exclaimed Mrs Gerome, as she pulled off her bonnet, wig, and spectacles, and threw them on the bed.

Eudora staggered backwards.

"Mrs Gerome! Oh! how you have frightened me! I should never have discovered your identity. But what have you been doing, and why are you dressed up in such a disguise?"

"I didn't want you to know anything about it, Eudora," said the actress, as she divested herself of the rest of her attire, "and I am more than vexed that you should have found me out. Whatever made you come home so early?"

"I came home to see if I could be of use to you. I have been miserable the whole evening, believing you were ill," said Eudora, ready to cry when she thought how her solicitude had been thrown away.

"Good girl," said Mrs Gerome; "yet I wish you had not been quite so expeditious. I am not a good liar, Eudora, and I don't like being caught in an untruth. Yet I *was* ill, and am still—miserably so—"

"Then why did you dress yourself up like this, and go out of doors, instead of remaining at home to rest?"

"Because I have a fire here, child," exclaimed the actress, striking her breast, "that will not let me rest! and even certainty of loss is better than the horrible suspicions that haunt me day and night. As for my disguise, that is a common habit with me. I am famous for that sort of thing. I have penetrated, under various characters, into the houses of my most intimate friends, and they have never discovered my identity. I defy any one to find me out when I am determined to conceal myself. Why, this very evening, I have been sitting in the stalls of the Gaiety next to two people who know me as well as they know each other, and they talked on as unconcernedly as if I had been miles away. But you won't betray me, Eudora! I am sure I can trust you. I don't want even Hannah

to know that I have made such a fool of myself."

"Betray you!—never!" cried Eudora; "and since you are not really ill, and the exposure will not harm you, why should I care what you do? But, dear Mrs Gerome, has it been of any use? has it answered the purpose for which you undertook it?"

The actress buried her face in the bed pillows, and burst into a sudden flood of tears.

"Oh! yes, dear! it has answered my purpose only too well; it has turned doubt into conviction, and made me the most miserable woman on the face of the earth."

"Oh! dear friend, there is not any fresh trouble for you, I hope."

"No, Eudora! it is not fresh, it is as stale and as old as the hills! Indeed, it ought to be less than before—for now I know what I have to encounter, and should be able to meet it better." Then she dashed her tears away, and relapsed into her usual merry mood. "*Fresh!* I should think not.

There is nothing fresh in this world, my child. We live in an age of repetition, and can say with the dear old nigger, when his master accused him of being drunk again. 'Not drunk *again*, massa! same ole drunk, massa—same ole drunk!' But here comes the irreproachable Squires. There is only one thing, Eudora, in which that estimable woman does *not* copy me, and I wish she would. Her boots always creak. I feel as if I was having my teeth drawn whenever she comes into my presence with them on." And, leaping up, Mrs Gerome dashed past Eudora, into the hall; and assuring Mrs Squires that her headache was gone, and she was quite well again, desired her to bring in a bottle of champagne for supper, that Miss Thane and she might celebrate her recovery in an orthodox fashion. But, on Eudora's ear, her laughter fell with sadder significance than her tears had done.

CHAPTER VI.

"YOU ARE AN ANGEL!"

MRS GEROME went out very seldom into society, and saw but little company in her own house. But it was entirely her own choice that it should be so. She bore so high a reputation in her profession, as a woman against whom no one had dared openly to cast a stone, and her talents and vivacity made her so acceptable a guest, that some of the first houses in London would have opened their doors to her, had she wished to enter them. But she was peculiar in this, as in many other things. She dis-

liked the trouble and fatigue of attending large parties; she despised the falsehood, and sycophancy, and ill-nature she met with in the fashionable world, and she was bold enough, not only to say what she thought, but to carry her theories into practice.

"Why on earth, my dear child," she would argue with Eudora, "am I to take the trouble of dressing and driving out, on the only evening I can call my own in the week, to sit in a room with a set of idiots, who do nothing but stare at me and utter conventionalities? When I leave my fireside, Eudora, I must do it for something better than that. Give me half-a-dozen clever men and women to meet, with whom I can cross swords in argument, and even though I am worsted, I come home a better and a brighter woman for the contest. But what have I in common with a lot of fashionable fools? What should they know of the brain work I go through before I can appear before them

in any one of my favourite characters? They think the art of acting was born with me, like the nose on my face, and thoroughly believe they could do just as well themselves, if Providence had not placed them above the necessity of exercising their gifts. Pshaw! it makes me sick even to think of them, far more to go amongst them."

"But the Duchess of Downshire, Mrs Gerome? Surely it is an honour that she should have sent you this card for her garden party? I think you ought to go there, if only to show the world how much you are appreciated."

"That's the most sensible argument I have ever heard on the subject, Eudora; and if anything would take me to the duchess's next Thursday, it would be the desire to let her aristocratic friends see that she considers an actress good enough company for them. But the game is not worth the candle, my dear. And, after

all, who does not know it? The members of our profession are to be met now-a-days in the first drawing-rooms of the land; for the dukes and duchesses have found out at last that they can invite no guests so well able as we are to amuse the rest. That is what I am asked for, Eudora. To entertain her grace's friends, a task for which her grace is compelled to acknowledge herself incompetent. And I don't hold myself so cheap as that. If they want me to amuse them, let them come to the 'Athenian' and pay for their fun. Yet, you know, Eudora, that I am not ill-natured. I would do anything for my friends, but I do not consider the Duchess of Downshire worthy of that name."

"Ill-natured, dear! indeed no! far from it! Who could ever think so, who saw all the trouble you take for other people? For Mr Sherard's children, for instance. I have known you spend a whole afternoon in

amusing them—and for *me*, what have you *not* done for me?"

"Nonsense! child; you don't count! You are my adopted daughter, you know, and everything that I may have is yours. And as for Joe Sherard's brats—heaven help the poor things—they have little enough amusement, *I* know; and to have them here for a few hours, and feast them on buns and jam, is not only a glimpse of fairyland to them, but a real relief to their poor overworked mother. You never see me give much away in charity, Eudora. I hate sermons, and societies, and begging letter-writers—the very fact that they are instituted in order to make people feel ashamed not to give, raises all the devil in me to refuse. But I have my own ideas about charity nevertheless, and I think there is more kindness in helping those who are struggling to maintain the position they are entitled to in the world, than in providing braces to keep up the breeches of the natives

of some place on the other side of the globe."

"I am sure you are goodness itself to the Sherards. Sometimes I wonder how they would ever get on without you."

"Oh! my dear, Joe Sherard is one of my best and oldest friends, and such an angel into the bargain. No one knows the sacrifices of which that dear creature is capable, except his wife and a few intimate chums like myself. Why, Eudora, he is one of the most capable and hardworking men in the profession. There is nothing Joe couldn't play, if he were forced to it, but he has never got on, and he never will."

"How is that, Mrs Gerome?"

"Well, my dear, in the first place, he married too young—and here he is at five-and-thirty, saddled with a wife and seven children. Very few salaries could stand that sort of thing without feeling it. Then, Joe's looks are against him. His face is well enough, but his legs are too short for

his body, and an actor with short legs never comes to the front. So he has gone plodding on year after year, finding it as much as ever he can do to fill all those hungry little mouths with bread, and never being able to lay by a single sixpence. Just think of that, child! Nine creatures dependent for their entire living upon the exertions of one man, who might break down and fail any day! isn't it enough to paralyse his energies and drive him crazy, with dreaming of possible misfortune. Oh! I do pity dear old Joe Sherard with all my heart, and his good little wife into the bargain. Every minute of their lives is passed in labour, yet they never grumble, if those children have enough to eat, though I believe they often go without sufficient food themselves. It makes me cry to think of it! Here, Eudora, put the duchess's card in the rack. I shall not go to her *fête* on Thursday. I should have to get a new dress for the occasion if I did, which would probably be never

fit to wear afterwards—whilst that good little Mrs Sherard has worn the same black gown, to my certain knowledge, for the last two years. Go and write a note at once, and ask them all to come round here to dinner on Sunday. You don't mind the noise of the little ones, I know, and we'll get the biggest sirloin of beef we can find, and let them cut into it as they choose—bless their poor little hearts and bodies."

The tears rose to Eudora's eyes.

"You are an angel!" she cried, impulsively, to the actress. "I see now that you are a thousand times too good to make one of a heartless, slanderous, fashionable crowd."

"Rubbish," retorted Mrs Gerome, merrily. "I am just as perverse and selfish as any one of them, but you're such a silly goose that I can always take you in. Don't you see, child, that I am only following my own bent, in refusing the duchess's invitation, and asking these people on Sunday, instead?

I am a Radical, Eudora — an out-and-out Radical—with the heartiest contempt for all titles and estates in themselves, and I will only take men and women as I find them. Added to which, I am a thorough Bohemian. I hate the conventionalities of society, and its humbug is sickening to me. I should prefer, at any time, a quiet evening with dear old Joe and his wife, who can talk with me of the profession, and all the members connected with it, to the grandest party that was ever given at Marlborough House. So you see, my child, that I am not quite such an angelic being as you would like to make me out, and am pretty well following my own inclinations, in performing this wonderful act of charity."

Eudora shook her head.

" You will never lessen my good opinion of you, dear," she said; " nor make me think you otherwise than the kindest-hearted woman I have ever known."

"That's not saying much, after all," exclaimed the actress, "seeing that, before we met, your acquaintance with the fair sex was limited to Mrs Griffin and Barthomolew! Poor Mrs Griffin! What an awful old woman she was! I often wonder where she is now."

"Don't—*don't!*" cried Eudora, with a sudden horror.

Mrs Gerome looked at her with curiosity.

"You always seem very much moved if I mention Mrs Griffin's name, my dear," she said. "Surely, you were not so attached to her as to render her memory a pain to you?"

"No! no!" replied the girl, in a low voice; "only—I want so much to forget it, Mrs Gerome! It was so terrible! it makes me sad even to remember."

"True! I was wrong," returned her friend, attributing her dislike to any reference to Holyoak to the fact of the silence maintained by Edgar Deane; "and

I will take care not to allude to the subject again. You see now what a selfish, inconsiderate brute your 'angel' can be, Eudora."

Eudora wiped her eyes, and kissed her for reply.

"Am I to write to Mrs Sherard at once?" she asked.

"Yes, dear! if you will be so kind; and tell her I insist upon having all the children, down to the baby. Hannah loves babies, and will stow away half-a-dozen in the kitchen. And you and I will make a peregrination to the Lowther Arcade this afternoon, and lay in a stock of dolls and Noah's arks. *I* know how far a few shillings will go in that child's paradise. We have let our tongues run on too fast, my dear. Let us go out at once, and forget everything that is disagreeable in the bustle of the Strand."

Eudora had seen Mr and Mrs Sherard several times before, but she regarded them

with particular attention on the Sunday after this conversation. She could hardly believe that Mr Sherard was only five-and-thirty. She would have taken him for a man of fifty, if Mrs Gerome had not told her otherwise. His hair was grizzled; his face lined and careworn; his shoulders somewhat bent. His whole appearance bore that tired and subdued look that too often characterises those who have found life one hard long battle for existence. He had good features though; calm, patient eyes, and the kindest smile that ever lit up a well-shaped though rather facile mouth. His wife was a tiny woman, who seemed literally to be little else but skin and bone, but she was brisk and bright, although she had passed as weary a time as her husband. She had never been on the stage since her marriage, but all the nursing and household work had fallen to her share, and she had endured the pain of anxiety into the bargain. It

is a common opinion that men suffer most in the struggle for life; that all the care and anxiety are on their shoulders, whilst the wives and children have only to stay at home and be fed. But supposing their food is an uncertain blessing, what then? Is the breadwinner the only one to suffer? Is not someone at home kept in terrible suspense, whilst she watches her ailing or fractious children, not knowing when relief may come, or when it may fail them? Does anyone think she suffers less because she is compelled to remain idle instead of helping in the strife? Depend upon it, those who take an active part in the battle have the best of it. The ones to be pitied are those who remain at home to daily scan, with misty eyes and trembling hands, the lists of killed and wounded. So that it was highly creditable to little Mrs Sherard to continue brisk and cheerful, when she had brought up seven children on next to nothing, and her husband

was generally in the dumps, and Mrs Gerome declared it was the brightest jewel in her crown. And Mrs Sherard, understanding far better than her husband the reason of the many invitations given them to the little flat, positively adored the actress for her goodness to her family, and thought (with Eudora Thane) that she was the very best woman in the world. To see Joe Sherard, after an excellent dinner with Mrs Gerome, and the best part of a bottle of port wine, extended cosily in an arm-chair, with his pipe in his mouth, was to see him at his very best. The children were by that time judiciously relegated to tea and plumcake with Hannah in the kitchen, and the rest of the party would draw their chairs together in a friendly circle, and prepare themselves for a good long talk. Then it would be that Joe's lips would unlock, and, from touching on a reminiscence here, or recalling a memory there, he would

launch forth into a stream of theatrical recollections, that proved the power of the man's mind, as well as the genuineness of his humour.

On the Sunday in question, he was particularly funny and communicative, and Mrs Gerome was proportionately sympathetic.

" What a shame it is, Joe," she exclaimed, " that you are not in a better position! You are capable of far greater things than ever fall to your share. You should be playing the heavy lead, instead of general utility."

" Ah! Mrs Gerome, that is just what I tell him," said his little wife; " but Joe is so obstinate, it is of no use talking. Did you hear of his taking Jacques at an hour's notice last spring, when Mr Harold fell ill; and the newspapers couldn't say enough of his style or his voice? But Joe wouldn't make any use of it. I urged him to apply for something better then, but he went back to his old work, without a word."

"How can I afford to drop the bone for the shadow?" said Joe, with his pipe between his lips. "It's all very well for the wife to talk, Mrs Gerome, but I should be a fool to give up my present engagement for an uncertainty—and they have nothing else to give me at the 'Athenian.'"

"What do you get there?" asked Mrs Gerome. "Forgive the question, but I do not put it from idle curiosity."

"My dear soul—as if I could mistake your motive," cried Mr Sherard, "when you have never shown anything but kindness to me and mine! I get two pounds a-week, and have not drawn a penny more for the last four years, so you may suppose I have not too many hundreds laid up in the Savings Bank."

"The children's bread bill alone comes to twelve shillings," sighed Mrs Sherard; "and I don't believe they would be alive on less. They have the most alarming appetites, and often call me stingy for not

giving them more. But I am obliged to limit them, Mrs Gerome, indeed I am, or we could never make ends meet. As it is—" but here the little mother was interrupted by her husband.

"Here! shut up, wife, and don't be giving Mrs Gerome a list of our grievances. We *are* alive, so we're bound to be thankful, and if we have not always as much butter to our bread as we should like, we only row in the same boat with thousands of our fellow-creatures. Don't you begin to complain till you hear me do it."

"Oh! *you* would never complain, Joe, dear," returned Mrs Sherard. "I've known him go without tobacco for weeks, Mrs Gerome, because Fanny was ordered beef-tea, although I do believe there is nothing in the world he loves so well as his pipe."

"Except his wife and his babies," put in Joe, with a serene smile.

"But, Mr Sherard, can't we alter this?" demanded the actress. "The London

theatres are so over-stocked, that it is certainly very difficult, if you miss your footing on the boards, to regain it; but it is not so in the provinces. Fred Delamaine, of Heartpool, is a great friend of mine, and would do anything in his power to oblige me. Shall I write to him on your behalf? Would you take a stock engagement in the provinces if he made it worth your while?"

"*Would* I, Mrs Gerome? How can you ask me such a question, knowing the circumstances of my case? Only, I cannot resign my place at the 'Athenian,' until I have secured another engagement, in justice to these little ones, as well as to myself."

"I shall not ask you to do so. I am prudence itself with regard to my own business affairs, as Miss Thorne will tell you. But I will certainly write to Fred, and mention your name, and we will see what he says on the subject."

In a few days, the actress came to

Eudora with a beaming countenance, and an open letter in her hand.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, "was there ever anything so fortunate? Joe's the very man Delamaine's in want of. He is just about to produce a heavy drama at the Albert Theatre, with a good villain's part, and he will engage Sherard at once on my recommendation, at five pounds a-week. Oh! I *am* glad! How this news will rejoice the heart of that good little mother, to say nothing of dear old Joe himself. Order the brougham at once, Eudora, and let us drive round and tell them all about it. Joe must give in his notice immediately, as Fred Delamaine requires him as soon as possible! I wonder if I should offend them by offering to pay the children's fares to Heartpool, because it will come rather hard on Joe if he has to do it? They must take it as a loan, however, if they will not accept it as a gift. Oh dear! how happy I do feel! If Fred Delamaine were here, I would give

him the best kiss he ever had in his life!"

It is unnecessary to describe the thankfulness and joy that reigned in the Sherards' household when Mrs Gerome communicated to them the success of her application. The little mother could only sit and cry silently over the last comer; even Joe's kind eyes filled with tears, and both husband and wife embraced the actress with honest effusion. Five pounds a-week! two hundred and forty pounds a-year! Why, it appeared a fortune in their eyes, and they already talked of putting the elder children to school upon it, and having a servant to relieve Mrs Sherard of some of the burden entailed by the remainder.

Mr Sherard sent in his resignation to the manager of the "Athenian" at once; and in a fortnight they were to move to their new home. Meanwhile, Mrs Gerome and Eudora busied themselves with finding out what articles of dress would be most accept-

able in Mrs Sherard's nursery, until the little ones were newly rigged from top to toe, and even their mother was induced to accept some additions to her wardrobe, as from a sister.

Eudora (who had by this time completely identified herself with Mrs Gerome) took the greatest delight in carrying out her schemes of benevolence, for the more she saw of this woman, the more she admired and loved her. Sometimes she could hardly believe that it was only a few months since she had left Holyoak, and suffered so terribly in leaving it. Not that the memory of that time had faded—on the contrary, it was like a half-healed sore, liable to break out again on the least provocation, and so painful to the touch, that she did not dare uncover it to the light. But Mrs Gerome's friendship was a constant salve for her wounded affections. She had grown to look upon her as a mother—often she called her by that sacred name—whilst the actress in-

variably addressed her as her child; and she did not dream that they would ever again be parted. Had not Mrs Gerome contantly assured her that she was her adopted daughter, and that all she possessed she was ready to share with her? Eudora, therefore, had grown to believe that her friend really regarded her as occupying the place of her dead child, and that she would be her companion till her life's end. Her surprise and horror then may better be imagined than described, when Mrs Gerome called her into her bedroom, a few days before the Sherards started for Heartpool, and told her that she had made arrangements with Mr Delamaine for Eudora to take the juvenile lead in the new drama, and she would travel at the same time and in the company of their friends.

Mrs Gerome had evidently been crying very violently, when she made this announcement to Eudora, for her eyes were red and swollen, and her face bleared; but

she seemed quite to have made up her mind upon the subject; and the girl felt as if she had received a sudden blow. She became red and white by turns, her eyes dilated, her lips quivered, her look was one of mingled consternation and reproach.

"I—*I*—to go to Heartpool!" she faltered.

"Yes, dear!" rejoined the actress; "has it taken you so very much by surprise? I never intended to keep you in London more than a few months, Eudora. You will do nothing until you have received a good provincial training; and this is an excellent opening for you, especially as the Sherards will let you live with them. But you mustn't think I don't feel parting with you, child—for I do, keenly—but it is for your good, and you must go."

And here Mrs Gerome broke down and began to cry again, and Eudora flung herself into her arms and cried with her.

"Oh! dear Mrs Gerome! don't send me from you. Never mind what is good for

me. I would rather earn twenty shillings by your side, than twenty pounds away from you. And I thought—I thought—I was to be your daughter, and we were never to be separated again."

The actress put her gently from her.

"Eudora, dear! Listen to me! We love each other dearly—that goes without saying—but we mustn't let our private feelings interfere with business. If you were really my daughter, I should say just the same. You have chosen to become an actress, and must do everything you can to advance yourself in the profession. Do you suppose I should have reached my present position if I had dawdled about the London theatres, playing supers' parts, at twenty shillings a-week? I should never have gained an opportunity of knowing my own talent; there would have been no occasion to bring it out. No! I went into the provinces, and worked hard for some years, and at last I made a lucky hit — was seen — spoken

of—and praised, and was before the London public in a couple of months. And that's the only way to get on, Eudora."

"And am I to be away from you for years?" sobbed the girl.

A cloud overspread Mrs Gerome's brow.

"No, no, my child! we will hope not," she answered, softly; and then as though making up her mind to broach the subject, she added hurriedly, "but you must not forget, Eudora, that, although I appear well off, I spend my money as fast as I make it, and in case of my death, I shall have nothing to leave you."

"Oh! dear friend! how can you mention the subject, or think me so mercenary? I have never dreamt of you leaving me anything—why should you? I am not really your child—(I wish I were), and you have ties nearer than I can ever hope to be to you."

"No! my dear, you are wrong! I took you away from your friends and family, and consider myself bound to provide for you.

If I had laid by any money, I should secure it for your use, but I have not—at least, none worth speaking of. Therefore, I know that the unkindest thing I could possibly do, would be to keep you dependent on myself for your support. So long as I live, dear, it would be all very well, for your companionship has been one of the sweetest things my life has ever known; but if I should die, Eudora, my last hours would be miserable, thinking I left you destitute. So you must be a sensible girl, and look at this engagement in its proper light—as a first-rate and most unexpected opening for you."

"How did you hear of it?" inquired Eudora.

"Delamaine came up yesterday to town to see Joe Sherard, and asked me at the theatre if I could recommend him a leading juvenile. I pointed you out to him, and he was pleased with what he saw you do. He will give you three pounds a-week, and

make you an independent woman, and the Sherards will gladly let you board and lodge with them. That settled the question with me, for I would not have let my adopted daughter go to a strange place, to live in lodgings by herself, on any consideration. She knows as much as that I hope, without my telling her?"

"She knows that in every arrangement you have ever made on her behalf, you have thought first of her comfort, and well-being, and pleasure," replied Eudora, gratefully.

"I should be a very bad mother if I didn't," said Mrs Gerome. "But had it not been for the Sherards, I would not have heard of your taking the engagement. Actors and actresses in the provinces, Eudora, get into a very bad habit, occasionally, of joining company—sometimes three and four young people of opposite sexes—and living in the same house together. They say they do it to save expense, and for the sake of

society; but any amount of loneliness is preferable to it. Mind you remember what I say. These impromptu family parties may be conducted on the most innocent principles, but the members never get the credit for it. If you cannot live with a respectable married couple like the Sherards, or with a quietly behaved girl, live by yourself, and never be persuaded to join such a household as I have described to you. I have heard the evil that has been said of them, and I have seen the evil that has arisen from them; and, if you are the girl I take you for, to be forewarned is to be forearmed."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs Gerome! I will never forget what you say. But what will you do when I am gone—shall you remain at the flat? I shall love to think of you in the same place where we have been so happy together."

"Dearest child! I have not yet decided on my own plans. I shall not be at liberty

to leave London till September; and then, perhaps, I may run up to Heartpool, and have a look at you! I am afraid my residence in Holyoak has demoralised me. I seem to have quite a longing to see the green fields and the trees again. I often wish I had a little cottage somewhere, out at Hampstead or Hammersmith, where I could run down from Saturday to Monday. I daresay it would be full of earwigs and draughts, and all kinds of horrors, and I should be sick of it in a month. Still, my fancy often wanders that way, and you need never be surprised to hear that I have become the proud possessor of some four-roomed tenement, entitled, *Beau Regard* or *Sans Souci*, or something equally suggestive of earwigs and draughts. And then, when we are both tired of professional life, my child, and have made our fortunes on the boards, we will retire together to *Beau Regard*, and attend to the pigs and cabbages for the rest of our days."

"I am afraid when we have made our fortunes, that we shall not be satisfied with a four-roomed house," said Eudora, smiling.

"Oh! you ambitious girl! I see you are looking forward to a coronet. Well! I might have had one, Eudora, but I preferred following the dictates of my own heart" —with a deep sigh—"and a pretty dance it has led me. Take care of your heart, dear child! It the most unlucky possession the Almighty ever bestowed upon a woman!"

"Ah! Mrs Gerome, there is no need to warn me! To fall in love is the very, *very* last thing I am likely to do."

"Perhaps so! but some one may fall in love with you, and girls are too apt to mistake their flattered vanity for affection. And whilst I am on this topic, Eudora, I would like to put you on your guard against Fred Delamaine. He is a very good fellow, with no real harm in him, but he has not lost his

eye for a pretty girl yet, and is fond of expressing his admiration by presents of gloves and flowers. Don't let him give you anything. Be very courteous to him, because he is your manager, and his gifts will really be offered in kindness, but don't accept them. Tell him quietly that I forbid you to do it. For Fred has a wife, my dear—if a creature who only lives to make a man miserable can be called by that name—and though she hates him herself, she becomes deadly jealous of any girl whom he likes, and will make the place too hot to hold you, if you excite her anger. She is a low, common woman, whom he picked out of the second row of the ballet, and was fool enough to marry, and her manners match her origin. She interferes a great deal too much in the affairs of the theatre, and tries, as the manager's wife, to queen it over everybody there; but if you don't make her your enemy, Fred will see that she doesn't go too far. And now, I think

I have nothing more to say to you, my darling, excepting that I hope you will be very happy in your new life, and that if you find you are not so, you shall return to me."

Eudora thought that she had never really appreciated all the comfort and pleasure she enjoyed from Mrs Gerome's companionship, until she was called upon to resign it. The moment of parting was a very bitter one for both of them. The actress had generously provided her young friend with everything that she could possibly require in her new life. Her boxes were filled with serviceable linen and handsome dresses, and her purse amply stocked with funds. She was starting on her theatrical career without a care, except for the parting with what she certainly now loved best on earth.

The two women clung to each other, and sobbed their hearts out before they could make up their minds to say the last fare-

well; but at last it was spoken, and in another minute, Eudora Thane found herself speeding away in the train towards Heartpool, in company with Mr and Mrs Sherard and their numerous babies.

CHAPTER VII.

"I AM UTTERLY ALONE."

EUDORA had not been many days in Heartpool before she realised the truth of what Mrs Gerome had told her. Mr Delamaine was a kind-hearted man and a most charming manager, but most of his good intentions on behalf of his company were frustrated by the jealousy of his wife. He could not raise a girl's salary, nor promote her to a better position in the theatre, without giving Mrs Delamaine cause to suspect there was something wrong; and to pour out the vials of her wrath (which usually included a large

amount of vituperation) on the head of the innocent offender. This lady's spite was particularly directed towards the principals of the theatre. She had not always been in the second row of the ballet; she had actually played small parts before she became Mrs Delamaine, and she had fondly imagined that her promotion in social life would also result in her promotion in the profession. She had quite thought that as the wife of so important a manager as Mr Delamaine she would appear in all the leading parts at the Albert Theatre. But her husband had decided otherwise. It was quite sufficient, so he told her, that *he* should have made a fool of himself, without permitting her to do the same. Mrs Delamaine had, therefore, never appeared in public since her marriage, but she was continually to be found behind the scenes, and in the dressing-room, interfering with every one, from the principal lady to the call-boy, and making herself generally disagreeable.

There was but one opinion in the Albert concerning her, and Eudora found, on the first occasion of her visiting the theatre, that everyone knew as much and talked as freely of the manager's wife as Mrs Gerome had done.

It was not till the second morning after their arrival in Heartpool that she and Mr Sherard found themselves called to rehearsal. They were already settled in commodious lodgings on the outskirts of the town, where they left the little mother beaming with contentment over the manufacture of a beefsteak pudding for their dinner, whilst the children were shouting with delight as they chased each other round the cabbages in the back garden.

Joe Sherard heaved a sigh of thankfulness as he nodded to them for the last time before he turned the corner. It was the first rehearsal for the new drama, and the stage was in proportionate confusion. Everybody was there, but no one knew

anything about their proper positions—exits, or entrances, and a great deal of time was consumed in discussion and argument. The stage, moreover, was blocked up with scenery; the new piece being in several tableaux, which included a chalk pit, a charnel house, the summit of Mount Vesuvius, and the interior of Mabille. Mr Delamaine caught sight of Eudora and Sherard as soon as they made their appearance, and advanced courteously to receive them.

"How do you do, Miss Thorne," he said, removing his hat, "I hope this is only the commencement of a long and profitable acquaintance. Let me introduce you to our leading lady, Miss Anerley! Ah! Sherard, my boy! glad to see you're punctual. Harewood, our stage manager, was asking after you just now. Let us go and find him. You have a heavy part before you, and he wants to consult you about the drop into the crater. There

he is on the O. P. side." With which the two gentlemen walked off together, leaving Eudora to make acquaintance with the leading lady.

Miss Anerley was a young woman of about five-and-twenty; tall, with a good figure and a handsome face, with an assumption of dignity, moreover, which showed that she was neither to be patronised, nor taken in. She bowed graciously to Eudora when Mr Delamaine mentioned her name, but she did not offer to shake hands with her, nor to make any advance towards friendship. Miss Anerley was on the stage of the Albert Theatre that morning strictly on business, and appeared to feel no curiosity on any subject, except her part in the drama.

"I presume you play 'Lottie,'" she remarked to Eudora, who answered in the affirmative.

"Just so! I play 'Lady Gwendoline,' of course. We have a great deal of

'business' together in the third and fourth act. Have you had your part yet?"

"Oh, yes; I received it in London. I believe I am 'word-perfect,' but it is impossible to study a character from a single part."

"Quite impossible, therefore I never attempt it. I cannot study until I have rehearsed. But there is one thing I should like to say to you."

"Pray, say whatever you feel inclined, Miss Anerley."

"Don't let any one but Harewood interfere with the business of your part. You see that stout woman in the black velvet cloak opposite?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who she is?"

"I can guess! I conclude it is Mrs Delamaine."

"You are right. And perhaps you have heard what she *was* into the bargain?"

"I have heard something, but I do not feel justified in repeating it."

"You need not be afraid. Everyone speaks openly of her here, and she knows it. Fred did the worst thing in his life when he married her; but there were reasons which left him no choice. I remember her in this very theatre two years ago; a common girl whom I never even noticed in passing; by whom I should have considered myself insulted if she had presumed to address me, and now she attempts to come the manager's wife over me. But I will not permit it, and if you wish to hold your proper position in the Albert, Miss Thorne, you will not permit it either."

"Has she only been married two years!" exclaimed Eudora. "How old she looks! What is her age?"

"Not more than mine, I believe, but that sort of woman ages soon. She has grown fearfully coarse, too, during the last twelvemonth. I suppose she does too little, and eats too much. If Fred

wanted to keep her in health, he ought to have put her in his kitchen, and left her there."

Eudora had hardly done laughing at this sally, when the subject of their remarks bustled across the stage to meet them.

"Good mornin', Miss Anerley," she said, in a coarse voice; "and this is Miss Dora Thorne, I suppose. Well, we're very glad to see yer, and I hope you'll work well, and then we shall get on together. You've got a capital part in the new piece—better than you've ever had before, I dessay."

"I don't think so," replied Eudora, quietly. "I have played the juvenile lead to Miss Lushington at the 'Athenian' on several occasions."

"Ah, well! if you find yourself in a fix you must ask me, and I'll set yer right. I'm the manager's wife, you know, and it's my business to see that things

are done properly. By-the-bye, Miss Anerley, I've been tellin' Fred you must have a different hat for the disguise in 'Love's Bondage.' Yours is a deal too tall; it makes you look a perfect giantess —and I don't like cherry ribbons with your fair 'air— blue would become you ever so much better."

The leading lady turned and regarded the manager's wife with a calm disdain that bordered on sublimity.

"I prefer the tall hat and the red ribbons," was all she deigned to say in reply.

"Oh! well, Fred don't," rejoined Mrs Delamaine, rather confusedly. "He agrees with me altogether, but you must do as you like, I suppose. Only I've given you the 'int, remember, and you may be sure I'm as good a judge as any."

Harewood, the stage manager, accompanied by Sherard, here came up to be introduced to Eudora, and Mrs Delamaine was forced to make way for him. But

the next moment her loud voice was to be heard admonishing the supers, or ordering about the stage carpenter.

"D—n that woman!" exclaimed Harewood impatiently. "She would take every bit of my business out of my hands if I would allow her. I can never give an order, but she countermands it, till the men are at their wits' ends to know what to do. I wish to goodness she'd confine her discipline to her husband and her home."

"What has poor Fred done that you should wish to condemn him to such torment?" said Miss Anerley. "Let him wait for his purgatory a few years longer."

"Whilst we endure it in his stead," replied the stage manager laughing.

Eudora soon found that the opinions of the principals were shared by every one in the theatre (including the manager himself), and that Mrs Delamaine was generally and cordially disliked. But she re-

membered Mrs Gerome's caution, and would not allow the fact to interfere with her own comfort.

She went quietly and steadily about her business, receiving Mrs Delamaine's suggestions with perfect courtesy, whilst she pertinaciously followed Mr Harewood's instructions instead, and thereby puzzling the manager's wife to such a degree that she did not know what to make of her. If Miss Thorne had only refused to listen to her, or complained of her interference, or looked sulky when she spoke, she would have had some grounds on which to report her misconduct to Mr Delamaine. But as she invariably looked pleasant and answered gently, and when questioned as to why she did not follow the advice offered her, referred her tormentor to Mr Harewood, she left the manager's wife completely at a loss.

But Mrs Delamaine was not a woman to be baulked of her revenge. She did

not like Eudora for many reasons. She was far too pretty to suit her fancy, added to which she was a gentlewoman in speech and manner, which made her contrast too favourably with her superiors (as the manager's wife certainly considered herself), and she gave too much satisfaction in the theatre, which was the last and gravest offence of all. Mrs Delamaine wished her husband to succeed in business, but she hated the means which led to his success. The applause of the house was gratifying to her, because it spelt "money," but she could have wrung the neck of the girl who raised it. A stage strewn with bouquets was an indication of the merits of the performer, but she would have liked to have smothered her with them afterwards.

She was like many other people in the world. She wanted to have her own way *in* her own way. She loved the velvet cloaks and sable trimmings and

gold jewellery with which her husband's good luck adorned her, but she wanted to be the means of that good luck herself; to have not only the fortune and envy it excited, but the praise and the admiration and the merit which produced it. And, therefore, whilst she sported the velvets and the satins which became her position as a manager's wife, she did everything in her power to spite the honest workers by whose exertions they were provided.

So, even Eudora's talent, and the efforts she made to turn it to account, were objectionable to Mrs Delamaine. And as for those violet eyes, with their lovely beseeching expression, which turned the heads of stalls, and pit, and gallery, she would have liked to get a pair of red-hot curling-tongs and put them out altogether. She would not allow Mr Delamaine to suggest a single alteration in dress or position, that should enhance the girl's beauty, and was ready to

cry with mingled rage and mortification when the local papers noticed the grace of her actions, or the sweetness of her expression.

At last, when the manager, having discovered that Eudora could sing, suggested that a ballad should be introduced in the melodrama, to show off her voice, his wife was certain that the culminating point was reached. She had noticed, too, the deferential manner that was maintained between Mr Delamaine and Miss Thorne (for Eudora had been very particular in observing Mrs Gerome's caution on this head), and felt convinced that it was assumed, in order to hide the existence of a warmer feeling, and that she had only to wait long enough, and to watch carefully enough, to find out what was wrong.

Meanwhile, Eudora (entirely unconscious that Mrs Delamaine had condescended to become jealous of her) was as happy as she could be, apart from Mrs Gerome; and each

day increased her respect and affection for the Sherards. As for that worthy couple, and their little family, they were simply living in clover. The four eldest children went to a day-school, whilst the younger ones played about, under the supervision of a small servant, which left their mother time to mend and make their clothes, and look after the creature comforts of her husband. Never, since Joe and she had rashly married on a pound a-week, had they been so happy together. There was no luxury, but there was no stint. The little ones had plenty of wholesome food to eat, and the two workers never came back from the theatre without finding a comfortable dinner or supper awaiting them. Joe had as much tobacco and bitter ale as that honest creature could possibly consume; and to see his face beaming from out a cloud of smoke, like a satisfied cherub, whilst his wife bustled about the room, looking after his meals, or setting things in order, was a

sight in itself; and Eudora often thought that if Mrs Gerome could only witness the happiness that reigned in those little rooms, she would be amply repaid for all the trouble she had taken.

But the time went on, and there seemed little chance of her visiting Heartpool. October had now set in; Joe's pipe was smoked beside a roaring fire, and it was hard sometimes to leave the warm room and cosy tea-table, and turn out into the chilly night air, to walk backwards and forwards to the theatre. Eudora had hoped to see her friend again long before this, but one thing after another had occurred to delay their meeting.

Mrs Gerome's letters also had become very much depressed in their tone of late, and she had often alluded to the void in her life occasioned by Eudora's absence, which made the girl all the more eager to see her again. But there was no hope of her being able to obtain a holiday, for

some time to come. The melodrama, for which she had been specially engaged, had run its course and faded into obscurity, but it had been succeeded by others, and Eudora had become such a favourite with the Heartpool audiences, that her presence was quite indispensable in the theatre.

She heard constantly, however, from Mrs Gerome, and wrote to her as constantly in reply. She read, with a smile, that the actress had at last found the little cottage she had so long been in search of, somewhere near Henley, and was enraptured with its appearance. According to Mrs Gerome's description, it was simply perfect; with a tiny garden, and an enormous mulberry tree, and just sufficient accommodation for Eudora and Hannah and herself.

"If I had searched the world round," wrote Mrs Gerome, enthusiastically, "I could not have found a retreat better

suited to my taste. It is just what I wanted; and when I have set it in order, it will be a perfect *bijou*. My engagement at the 'Athenian' terminates on Saturday, and Hannah and I go down to the cottage the very next day. I cannot tell you, dearest child, how I am longing and wearying to get out of London. I am sick to death of the place, and my life, and everything! If I could only forget I am myself, how happy I should be. And I am really looking forward to my little cottage as a means of distraction. It has to be fresh painted and papered, and all sorts of improvements made in it; and I mean to superintend everything. Such quaint little windows and cupboards as it has, Eudora! I am sure you will fall in love with them at once. Don't forget the address, darling—'Mulberry Cottage, Henley-on-Thames;' and write very soon to your loving friend,

"HELEN GEROME."

Eudora received this letter at a time when she was too busy to answer it.

They were in full rehearsal of more than one new piece at the "Albert," and she was standing on the stage sometimes for six and eight hours together. But she did not forget her adopted mother, and amused herself by picturing her, with her usual eager enthusiasm for anything new, doing half the work of reformation in the cottage with her own hands, and driving painters and plasterers wild, in her endeavours to incite them on to further exertions. She longed very much to be with Mrs Gerome at this particular moment, and to help her as she had done at the flat, but she knew it to be an impossibility, and wisely put the thought from her, particularly as a new drama was to be produced at the end of the week, and she required all her wits in order to perfect herself in her part. On the Saturday, however, as she was in the dressing-room of the "Albert," carefully preparing

for appearance on the stage, a letter, in a strange writing, was put into her hand.

Eudora glanced with some curiosity at the address, but she had no time to gratify it, for " beginners " had been already called, and the artists were in that state of nervous excitement which the production of a new piece naturally provokes.

Mrs Delamaine also was more than usually interfering and ubiquitous, and Miss Anerley and she had already had a passage of arms on the subject of her intrusion into the principals' dressing-room. Everyone felt flurried and hurried, and Eudora threw the letter into her box, and hastened to the wings.

The first and second acts passed off well, and the applause was loud and frequent. The new drama was evidently going to be a success, and in the excitement of the idea, she forgot all about her letter, until she had a " wait," at the commencement

of the third act. Then she drew it from the recesses of her dressing-box, and sat down on a chair to digest its contents.

Miss Anerley, who was renovating her charms at the same time—touching up her eyebrows, putting a little more oxyde of zinc upon her nose, and deepening the hue of her cherry lips—had no idea that anything was wrong, until her attention was attracted by Eudora falling heavily upon the floor. The girl had uttered no cry, nor made the least sound of pain nor alarm—her first signal of distress was made by fainting dead away, with the open letter grasped in her hand. Miss Anerley called for help, and ran to her assistance. Half-a-dozen ladies were on the spot in a moment, dashing cold water in her face—shaking her, and entreating her, by everything they had ever heard or thought of, to "*come to*," before she was required for the third act.

"Oh! do make an effort, there's a dear!"

they exclaimed simultaneously, "your 'cue' will be on in a minute, and Delamaine will fine you five shillings if there's a 'stage wait;'" until, between drenching, and shaking, and talking, Eudora opened her eyes again.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed wildly, as she pushed them away, and struggled to her feet. "What have I done? what are you saying to me?"

"You've been ill, dear, that's what it is," replied one of her attendants anxious, now the immediate alarm was over, to find the cause of it; "you've had a letter, and it upset you. Why did it upset you, dear? What was in it?"

Eudora stared about her in a bewildered manner, and clutched afresh the letter in her hand.

"*A letter!* Ah, yes!" she groaned; "I remember now—Oh! my God!"

"Miss Thorne called!"—exclaimed a shrill voice at the dressing-room door.

Eudora thrust the letter in her bosom, and made a dash for the landing.

"Don't speak to me!" she cried, with a strange, wild light in her eyes; "don't touch me. Let me finish what I have to do, and then—*then*, I shall have time to think."

She rushed down to the stage as she spoke, and appeared at her proper entrance.

Her business lay chiefly with Joe Sherard in this scene, and he noticed at once the difference in her demeanour, and wondered what had come to the girl. Not that Eudora played worse than usual: on the contrary, there was a force and power in her words and actions, that made the scene go with the utmost brilliancy, and brought down the fervent admiration of the house.

But yet she hardly looked like herself: if Joe Sherard had not known her better he might have thought she had been drinking too much champagne, there was such a

feverish, elevated look in her eyes, such a bitter, declamatory ring in her voice. He was too steady an actor to be put off his play by anything short of the house being on fire, but he could not help feeling startled by Eudora's appearance, and wondering at the cause of it.

Luckily for her success that evening, she had business on the stage till the fall of the curtain, for she certainly could not have maintained sufficient composure to finish her work, if she had had a moment to devote to her own thoughts.

As it was, when the "drop" had at last descended, amidst the continued plaudits of the house, and Joe Sherard placed his hand upon her shoulder, and asked her kindly if anything was the matter, she turned, with a loud cry, and fell into his arms, exclaiming,—

"She is gone! she is dead! I have lost my best friend—I am utterly alone!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"IT IS VERY MYSTERIOUS."

YES! it was actually true! Mrs Gerome, so full of life, and vigour, and energy, had been suddenly cut off from amongst them, and become only a name!

As soon as Mr Delamaine heard the news, he made Joe Sherard lead Eudora to his private room, where they placed her, like a helpless burthen, on a chair; whilst they perused the letter which had brought the fatal intelligence.

"Mulberry Cottage,
"Henley-on-Thames.

"DEAR MADAM,—I write to tell you the

sad news that your good friend, and my dear mistress, has left us. Her death took place so sudden that I can hardly bring myself to believe it is true. We only came to the cottage on Sunday, and she was gone by Tuesday night, from congestion of the lungs, brought on, the doctor says, from the damp, and uncovered drains. She was buried yesterday, in the cemetery at Kensal Green. Mr Gerome was present, and made all the arrangements. I am going home to my friends as soon as possible, as I feel my loss sadly, and there is nothing to keep me here; but I thought I should like to tell you of her death with my own hand, as I know she would have wished me to do—if she had thought she was going.—I am, madam, yours obediently,

"HANNAH SQUIRES."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Delamaine, "to fancy she is gone—the very woman of all others whom I would have backed

with my whole fortune to live for the next thirty years! it seems impossible. Why! she was the very picture of health —a miracle of strength, and energy, and vigour. Ah, well! we never know whose turn it will be next. I suppose she must have overdone it this season, and laid herself open to disease."

Joe Sherard looked the personification of misery.

"I can say, with this poor child here," he sighed, "that I and my wife have lost our best friend. There never was a kinder-hearted nor more generous woman than Mrs Gerome. Miss Thorne and I are not the only ones who will suffer by her death. God bless her!"

"She must have saved a lot of money," observed the manager, reflectively; "I wonder who will come into it? I hope she has left a will—and that that scoundrel Gerome will not derive any benefit from her death. If ever a man ill-treated a

woman, and tried to break her heart, it is he. And yet she never cast him off. She helped him with money to the very last, as I can attest, and never lost hope that he would return to his duty, and her. And now she has gone first, poor, dear soul! and left that good-for-nothing fellow to insult her memory. Well, well! the doings of Providence are inscrutable! They are a riddle which I have given up trying to guess a long time ago."

"Mr Sherard! mayn't I go home?" demanded Eudora, in a low, broken voice.

"Of course you shall, my dear," replied the bustling manager, taking the words out of Joe's mouth; "and I will have a cab at the door in a moment for you. Do you wish to change your dress first? Very well, that's a brave girl! we only make things worse by shirking our duty. The ladies have all gone by this time, and you will have the dressing-room to

yourself. And the cab shall be waiting your return."

"And have I your permission, Mr Delamaine," continued Eudora, "to go to—to—Henley, to-morrow, if I am back by Monday?"

"Certainly, my dear, do just as you wish about it—only, don't you think, as our poor friend is already buried, that it is rather a waste of time and money."

"I *must* see Hannah," replied the girl, in a choked voice. "Why didn't she write to me before? They might have let me see her once again."

"She *might* have written sooner, certainly," said Mr Delamaine; "but I think it is fortunate she did not. Then, you would have only preserved a most painful remembrance of our poor friend. Now, you can think of her as you saw her last, full of life, and activity, and beauty. I do not hold myself by death-bed partings, if they can possibly be avoided."

Eudora could not answer him. She was stunned by the blow she had received, and rising slowly, left the room without another word.

"That poor child will feel this terribly," said Joe Sherard; "not but what we shall all do that, but Mrs Gerome was her nearest friend; in fact, she looked upon and always designated Miss Thorne as her adopted daughter."

"In that case, there is little doubt she is mentioned in the will, and I wonder Gerome has not written to her himself on the subject. We must look after this matter for her, Sherard, for he is quite knave enough to cheat the girl if it is possible to do so."

"Yes; and if she does not hear in the course of a few days, I will make the proper inquiries for her. Here she comes, and the sooner I get her home, the better. Good-night, Delamaine. If we receive any further particulars you shall hear them at once."

Eudora did not speak a word in the cab going home, nor when she entered the house. Once Joe Sherard laid his hand upon hers in the darkness, and she shrunk from it as though she could not trust herself to receive a token of kindness from any one; and as they crossed the threshold, she simply said the word "explain" to him, as she went swiftly upstairs and locked herself into her own room. Meanwhile the explanation was given and received in the little parlour, and not without tears on either side. The Sherards had lost a true benefactress in Mrs Gerome, but they mourned more for the loss of their friend than for the benefits she had so liberally bestowed upon them. They talked of her wit and talent and playful vivacity, far into the night, and agreed that it was almost impossible to realise that her bright beaming face and active body were lying still and pulseless in the grave. The news had come too suddenly upon them for

belief. When Eudora crept down in the morning, silent and subdued, but ready attired for her journey, she found that Mr Sherard had arranged to accompany her to London. She remonstrated faintly at first, but he was decided, and she was only too thankful for his escort and protection.

Heartpool was only about three hours' journey from the metropolis, but Sunday trains are dilatory, and it was the afternoon before they reached Henley-on-Thames. Everybody was ready to show them Mulberry Cottage, the place where the strange lady had died the week before, and in a few minutes they found themselves within sight of it. Eudora shuddered as she saw the mulberry tree which stood in the front garden, and thought that she was about to enter the very room where her dear adopted mother had drawn her last breath. An old woman answered their summons for admittance, when their first inquiry was for Mrs Squires.

"Mrs Squires! do you mean the servant as was here with the lady that was buried last Friday? Oh! she went to her own home yesterday morning, and left me in charge of the cottage, and there's a seal upon everythink, and I'm bound to remain by 'em till the gennelman fetches 'em away."

"Can you give us Mrs Squires' address?" demanded Sherard, for Eudora was not in a condition to make any inquiries for herself.

"Not I, sir! She's gone for good and all, so she told me, and I had no reason to keep her address. She had some words with the gennelman as was here—the lady's husband I believe they called 'im—because he couldn't find as much money about the house as he expected, and then she packed up her belongings and left the place. Her lady had given her all her dresses (so she told me), but the gennelman, he wouldn't let her have 'em, so she just went off as she was, and he searched her box before

he'd let it leave the house, which everyone thought uncommon mean of 'im."

"Poor Hannah! As if she would have robbed her of a sixpence," murmured Eudora. "Oh! Mr Sherard, ask her if I may go up into *the* room—you know—*her* room, and I will ask for nothing more."

The old woman seemed to be half afraid to grant the permission, but, after a little persuasion, was induced to give it, on condition the young lady touched nothing.

"For there's a seal upon everythink, miss, and if that's broke, the Lord help me!"

Thereupon they followed her up the stairs as if the sacred shadow of Death still lay upon the house, and were ushered into a bedroom, the furniture of which Eudora recognised as having been taken from the flat. She sunk down on her knees beside the bed, and her overburdened heart found relief in a burst of tears.

Sherard did not attempt to comfort her;

he stood by the window, looking out upon the falling leaves, whilst the old woman gaped in the door-way; and the girl buried her face in the pillows, and sobbed without restraint.

"If I could only have seen her *once* more," she said, when she had found her voice again. "If I could have received *one* last look or smile, to know she thought of me, I think I could have been resigned. But to lose her like this: to hear she has gone out into this horrible darkness, where I cannot follow her, nor receive a message from her, is too much! Oh! Mr Sherard, is it possible she can have died without one thought of me?"

"I don't think it is at all possible, Eudora, that is if she knew that she was dying," replied Joe Sherard; "but until we hear of Squires's address, I see no means of ascertaining."

"It was all very suddent," quoth the old woman, "that I can say; but there's the

doctor as attended the poor lady—p'r'aps he would be able to tell what you may want to know."

"What is his name?" inquired Sherard.

"He's a Dr Moseley, sir, and he lives in Waterdale House, just at the turn of the road. He knew Mrs Squires, too, for I think he wrote some letters for her to the lady's friends, to say as she was gone."

"I was sure that letter was not written by a servant," said Joe. "Come, Eudora, my dear, let us go and call on this doctor, and see if he has any intelligence to give us."

Eudora rose, and dried her eyes—kissed the pillow against which she had leant her head, two or three times passionately, threw a lingering glance around the room, and followed Sherard quietly downstairs.

Dr Moseley was at home, and, after a short delay, condescended to receive them. He did not like being called away from the

bosom of his family on his only day of rest, unless it were on an emergency, but when he heard how anxious his visitors were for news of their dead friend, and how impossible it was for them to see him on any other day, his features relaxed, and he became friendly and communicative.

"You are quite welcome to any information I can give you, Mr Sherard," he said, "but I am afraid it is very little. I actually was not aware that the cottage was tenanted, until I received a summons to attend the lady there, and by the time I reached her side she was past my aid. It seems that she had been taken ill with internal inflammation on the Sunday night, from over-fatigue and damp, I imagine, and her constitution being very fragile, she succumbed to the symptoms at once. I was really only in time to be able to give a certificate of death."

"You surprise me," said Sherard. "Every one considered Mrs Gerome to

have such a marvellous constitution. She was as strong as possible, and could undergo any amount of fatigue."

The doctor smiled compassionately for his ignorance.

"My dear sir, nothing is more deceptive than the apparent capability of supporting fatigue. This poor lady had doubtless a large amount of energy, which her friends mistook for vigour; but she had no stamina to resist disease—indeed, I have seldom seen people sink so rapidly beneath it. She went out like the snuff of a candle."

"Why didn't Hannah call you in sooner?" said Eudora; "you might have saved her, had you known of it in time."

"I *might*," replied Dr Moseley dubiously; "but it is uncertain. By 'Hannah,' I presume you mean the lady's maid who attended her; an intelligent and well-spoken person. She seemed in great distress herself about the occurrence, and often lamented that she had delayed seeking my advice.

But her mistress appears to have been rather obstinate and self-willed, and to have prevented her having her own way."

Eudora opened her eyes in surprise.

"Oh, no! not obstinate," she said; "*that* was totally unlike Mrs Gerome's character! Why! she gave in to Hannah in everything. Mrs Squires must have told you an untruth, sir, in order to excuse her own carelessness. It would have been far more like herself, obstinately to refuse advice."

"Well, my dear young lady, I only repeat what was told to me. When I first saw Mrs Gerome she was in a state of coma, and she never spoke again. I confess I think the funeral was unnecessarily hurried on; but Mr Gerome was down here by that time, and had everything his own way."

"May I ask you if Mrs Gerome left a will?" demanded Sherard.

"That hardly comes within the category

of my professional duties," said Dr Moseley; "but I believe not, and for this reason: Mr Gerome arrived here on the Thursday, and sent for me, in a great rage because the coffin had been screwed down—as it appeared afterwards, by the order of Mrs Squires. He mentioned at the same time that he could find no will, nor any money in the house, and the servant refused to give him any information on the subject. He and Mrs Squires came to high words about it in my presence, during which she launched some home truths at him, which it is not in my province to repeat, but which seemed to hit Mr Gerome very hard. Anyway, he refused to remain in the cottage; but left the further arrangements for the funeral in my hands—and it took place the following day at Kensal Green."

"Of course Mr Gerome attended it?" said Sherard.

"Oh, yes! and so did the lady's maid. She was dressed in the deepest mourning,

and evidently much annoyed Mr Gerome by standing next to him throughout the ceremony, and casting the most exquisite hothouse flowers on to the coffin. She also addressed him once or twice, in what appeared to be an unseemly manner, for he became much perturbed, and stole away as soon as it was possible for him to do so."

"She could have said nothing that was too hard for him!" exclaimed Eudora indignantly, through her tears.

Dr Mosely elevated his eyebrows.

"Is that so? I am sorry to hear it. Well! it has been a sad business, but it is over. Mrs Squires, I understand, left Henley on Saturday, and Mr Gerome does not intend to visit it again. The furniture is to be sent to London next week, and the cottage is once more in the market. And I regret not to have been able to give you a more satisfactory account of the whole affair."

"It does indeed seem as if it were all over, and everything connected with her dear

memory scattered to the four winds of heaven," said Eudora mournfully, as she and Sherard walked to the station together after their interview with the doctor.

"It is all very mysterious, and there are some things which I cannot understand about it," replied Joe; "one is, about the will. Mrs Gerome must have saved money, Eudora, and she was a woman of business. She is not at all likely to have omitted making a will, particularly since she had taken you under her care, and engaged to provide for you."

"But, Mr Sherard! she has *done* that," said Eudora; "she has amply provided for me in placing me on the stage and putting me in the way of earning my own living. And I don't think she *had* saved money, for in one of the very last conversations we had together, she told me that she spent it as fast as she earned it, and that was the reason that she considered it her duty (in case of anything happening to her) to

make me independent. And I have been thinking several times to-day," continued Eudora, brokenly, "that she must have had some intuition of what was coming when she sent me so suddenly to Heartpool, for I know she felt parting with me, as much as I did with her."

"Well, my dear, as matters have turned out, it is a fortunate thing for you that she decided so sensibly. For I know nothing of your former life, Eudora, but I am quite sure that you were never born to earn your own living in any menial capacity."

"Oh! if I could only bring her back again!" cried the girl passionately, "if I could only bring her back, how thankfully would I engage myself to serve her in the very lowest capacity to my life's end. But I shall never—*never* do anything for her again. I shall never be able to try and return one tithe of the kindness she has bestowed upon me."

Eudora's grief was unrestrained, and for

some weeks it continued to be so. But grief, however violent, cannot last for ever, and work and the healing influence of home soon began to have their effect upon her mind. The Sherards were wise in their generation. They did not attempt to argue with the girl, nor to question the propriety of her abandoning herself to her sorrow; they simply left her alone, and the wound began to heal of itself. But Eudora Thane did not emerge from this second trouble as successfully as she had done from the first. It left her harder, less trusting, and more ready to question the justice that rules the world. She wanted to know the why and the wherefore of her pain, and, being unable to ascertain it, shrunk within herself, and became more callous to the sufferings of others, and less open to receive the sympathy which was extended to her own.

By strength of will, and much self-reasoning, she conquered the first vehem-

ence of her grief, but all her girlish simplicity died under the process, and left her a woman of the world. The two losses seemed to roll themselves into one and crush her spirit with their combined burthen, so that she never felt the tears rush into her eyes at the remembrance of Mrs Gerome, but the thought of Edgar Deane revived at the same moment to sicken her with a life that had hardly begun. Trouble has very different effects on different people. Some it brings to their knees howling for mercy; with others, it places a seal upon the heart and lips.

Eudora flew to her profession to find distraction for her pain, and acted all the better for the wound she had received. But she wept less and prayed less than she had done before, and the bloom of her childhood seemed to have passed away for ever.

END OF VOL. II.

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